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The God of the Amen

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THE GOD OF THE AMEN

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I.

“The God of the Amen.”

“He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth.”—ISAIAH lxxv. 16.



THE full beauty and significance of these remarkable words are only reached when we attend to the literal rendering of a part of them which is obscured in our Version. As they stand in the original, they have, in both cases, instead of the vague expression, “The God of truth,” the singularly picturesque one, “The God of the Amen.”

I.—Note the meaning of the Name. Now, *Amen* is an adjective, which means literally firm, true, reliable, or the like. And, as we know, its liturgical use is that, in the olden time, and to some extent in the present time, it was the habit of the listening people to utter it at the close of prayer or praise. But besides this use at the end of somebody else's statement, which the sayer of the “Amen” confirms by its utterance, we also find it used at the beginning of a statement, by the speaker, in order to confirm his own utterance by the word.

And these two uses of the expression, reposing on its plain meaning, in the first instance signifying, "I tell you that it is so"; and in the second instance signifying, "So may it be!" or, "So we believe it is," underlie this grand title which God takes to Himself here, "the God of the Amen," both His Amen and ours. So that the thought opens up very beautifully and simply into these two, His truth and our faith.

First, it emphasizes the absolute truthfulness of every word that comes from His lips. There is implied in the title, that He really *has* spoken, and declared to man something of His will, something of His nature, something of His purposes, something of our destiny. And now, He puts, as it were, the broad seal upon the charter, and says, "Amen! Verily it is so, and My word of Revelation is no man's imagination, and My word of command is the absolute unveiling of human duty and human perfectness, and My word of promise is that upon which a man may rest all his weight and be safe for ever." God's word is "Amen!" man's word is "perhaps." For in regard of the foundation truths of man's belief and experience and need, no human tongue can venture to utter its own asseverations with nothing behind them but itself, and expect men to accept them; but that is exactly what God does, and alone has the right to do. His word absolutely, and through and through, in every fibre of it, is reliable and true.

Now do not forget that there was one who came to us and said, "Amen! Amen! I say unto you." Jesus Christ, in all His deep and wonderful utterances, arrogated to Himself the right which God here declares to be exclusively His, and He said, "I too

have, and I too exercise, the right and the authority to lay My utterances down before you, and expect you to take them because of nothing else than because I say them." God is the God of the Amen! The last book of Scripture, when it draws back the curtain from the mysteries of the glorified session of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, makes Him say to us, "These things saith the Amen!" And if you want to know what that means, its explanation follows in the next clause, "the faithful and true witness."

But then, on the other hand, necessarily involved in this title, though capable of being separately considered, is not only the absolute truthfulness of the Divine word, but also the thorough-going reliance, on our parts, which that word expects and demands. God's "Amen," and "Verily," of confirmation, should ever cause the "Amen" of acceptance and assent to leap from our lips. If He begins with that mighty word, so soon as the solemn voice has ceased, its echo should rise from our hearts. The city that cares for the charter which its King has given it, will prepare a fitting, golden receptacle in which to treasure it. And the men who believe that God in very deed has spoken laws that illuminate, and commandments that guide, and promises that calm and strengthen and fulfil themselves, will surely prepare in their hearts an appropriate receptacle for those precious and infallible words. God's truth has corresponding to it our trust. God's faithfulness demands, and is only adequately met by, our faith. If He gives us the sure foundation to build upon, it will be a shame for us to bring wood, hay, stubble, and build these upon the Rock of Ages. The building

should correspond with its foundation, and the faith which grasps the sure word should have in it something of the unchangeableness and certainty and absoluteness of that word which it grasps. If His revelation of Himself is certain, you and I ought to be certain of His revelation of Himself. Our certitude should correspond to its certainty.

Ah ! my friend, what a miserable contrast there is between the firm, unshaken, solid security of the Divine word upon which we say that we trust, and the poor, feeble, broken trust which we build upon it. “Let not that man think that He shall receive anything of the Lord” ; but let us expect, as well as “ask, in faith, nothing wavering” ; and let our “Amen !” ring out in answer to God’s.

The Apostle Paul has a striking echo of the words of my text in the second Epistle to the Corinthians : “All the promises of God in Him are yea ! and through Him also is the Amen !” The assent, full, swift, frank—the assent of the believing heart to the great Word of God comes through the same channel, and reaches God by the same way as God’s word on which it builds comes to us. The “God of the Amen,” in both senses of the word, is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the seal as well as the substance of the Divine promises, and Whose voice in us is the answer to, and the grasp of, the promises of which He is the substance and soul.

II.—Now notice, next, how this God of the Amen is, by reason of that very characteristic, the source of all blessing.

“He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of Truth.” That phrase of

blessing one's self in, which is a frequent Old Testament expression, is roughly equivalent to invoking, and therefore receiving, blessing from. You find it, for instance, in the 72nd Psalm, in that grand burst which closes one of the books of the Psalter, and hails the coming of the Messianic times, of which my text also is a prediction. “Men shall be blessed in Him,” or, rather, “shall bless themselves in Him,” which is a declaration that all needful benediction shall come down upon humanity through the coming Messiah, as well as that men shall recognize in that Messiah the source of all their blessing and good. So the text declares that, in those days that are yet to come, the whole earth shall be filled with men, whose eyes have been purged from ignorance and sin, and from the illusions of sense and the fascinations of folly, and who have learned that only in the God of the Amen is the blessing of their life to be found.

Of course it is so. For only on Him can I lean all my weight, and be sure that the stay will not give. All other bridges across the great abysses, which we have to traverse or be lost in them, are like those snow cornices upon some Alp, which may break when the climber is on the very middle of them, and let him down into blackness out of which he will never struggle. There is only one path clear across the deepest gulf, which we poor pilgrims can tread with absolute safety that it will never yield beneath our feet. My brother! there is one support that is safe, and one stay upon which a man can lean his whole weight, and be sure that the staff will never either break or pierce his palm, and that is the faithful God, in Whose realm are no disappointments, amongst Whose trusters are no

heart-broken and deceived men, but Who gives bountifully, and over and above all that we are able to ask or think. They who have made experience, as we have all made experience, of the insufficiency of earthly utterances, of the doubtfulness of the clearest words of men, of the possible incapacity of the most loving, to be what they pledge themselves to be, and of the certainty that even if they are so for a while, they cannot be so always—have surely learned one half, at least, of the lesson that life is meant to teach us, and it is our own fault if we have not bettered it with the better half, having uncoiled the tendrils of our hearts from the rotten props round which they have been too apt to twine themselves, and wreathed them about the pillars of the eternal Throne, which can never shake nor fail. "He that blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself"—unless he is a fool—"in the God of the Amen!" and not in the *man* of the "per-adventure."

III.—Lastly, note how the God of the Amen should be the pattern of His servants.

"He that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth," or, "of the Amen." The prophet deduces from the name the solemn thought that those who truly feel its significance will shape *their words* accordingly, and act and speak, so that they shall not fear to call His pure eyes to witness that there are neither hypocrisy, nor insincerity, nor vacillation, nor the hidden things of dishonesty, nor any of the skulking meannesses of craft and self-seeking in them. "I swear by the God of the Amen, and call Thy faithfulness to witness that I am trying to be like Thee." That is what we ought to do, if we call ourselves

Christians. If we have any hold at all of Him, and of His love, and of the greatness and majesty of His faithfulness, we shall try to make our poor, little lives in such measure as the dewdrops may be like the sun, radiant like His, and of the same shape as His, for the dewdrop and the sun are both of them spheres. That is exactly what the Apostle, in that same chapter in 2 Cor., to which I have already referred, does. He takes these very thoughts of my text, and in their double aspect too, and says, Just because God is faithful, do you Corinthians think that, when I told you that I was coming to see you, I did not mean it? He brings the greatest thought that He can find about God and God's truth, down to the settlement of this very little matter, the vindication of Himself from the charge, on the one hand, of facile and inconsiderate vacillation, and, on the other hand, of insincerity. So, we may say, the greatest thoughts should regulate the smallest acts. Though our maps be but a quarter of an inch to a hundred miles, let us see that they are drawn to scale. Let us see that He is our Pattern; and that the truthfulness, the simplicity, the faithfulness which we rest upon as the very foundation of our intellectual as well as our moral and religious being are, in our measure, copied in ourselves. “As God is faithful,” said Paul, “our word to you was not yea! and nay!” And they who are trusting to the God of the Amen! will live in all simplicity and godly sincerity; their yea will be yea, and their nay, nay.

II.

The Names of the Saviour.

“ Our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.”—HEB. xiii. 20.



WORDS, like coins, get worn by use, and lose the sharpness of their inscriptions and images. To most of us, I suppose, the various names by which our Saviour is designated in Scripture are just like so many *aliases*, indiscriminately used, and all conveying the same impression. But, in truth, they each suggest some distinctive aspect of His nature or relations to us, and in Scripture are never used without at least a sidelong glance to their special significance. The writer's thought is always tinted, as it were, even if it is not deeply coloured, by the name which he selects.

Now there is no writer of the New Testament who is more sensitive to these different aspects of Christ's character and work as set forth in His different names than is the writer of this Epistle. I have thought that it might help us to realize more fully and distinctly the infinite sufficiency of what Jesus Christ is and does for us, if I try, however imperfectly, to

bring before you in this sermon the usage of this letter in respect of the designations of our Lord.

That, therefore, is my subject to-day. And I have chosen the words which I have read as our starting point, because they very strikingly bring together the extreme names ; that which expresses lowly manhood and that which expresses sovereign authority—"Jesus our Lord," in the union whereof lie the mystery of His being, and the foundation of our hopes, and by which union alone He becomes "that great Shepherd of the sheep."

I.—So, then, in the pursuit of this design, I have to ask you to notice, first, the simple, human name Jesus.

Now that designation of our Lord, standing alone, is extremely uncommon in the apostolic writings. The Apostle Paul very seldom employs it, and always with some special emphasis ; but it is so frequently used in this letter as to become a characteristic of the writer's style. And if we glance at some of the instances of its employment I think we shall feel its force. I cannot pretend to offer you an exhaustive catalogue of all these, but must be content in this, as in other parts of my sermon, to select only the salient points.

So, then, it is "Jesus" who "suffered without the gate." It is "Jesus" to whom we are encouraged to look as "the Author and Finisher of faith ; Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross." And then there come a considerable class of passages where we might more naturally have expected the other name, "Christ" ; in which it is "Jesus" who is represented as fulfilling the ancient covenant, and accomplishing all which law and sacrifice and priest

and Temple and prophet have dimly shadowed. So we read of Jesus as the "High Priest," and of "Jesus" as "entered into the Holy Place for us." And, again, it is "the blood of Jesus" by which "we have access with confidence" into the presence of God. All of which just point to His manhood as the necessary condition of His sacrifice and priesthood, without which it is impossible for men to have relations of friendship with the Father in heaven.

And then, finally, it is "Jesus" whom we are bid to follow with the eye of faith and aspiration as He ascends up on high and is "crowned with glory and honour" at the right hand of God, and passes within the gates of the heavenly Temple, the High Priest of our profession; who for us, as Forerunner, is entered thither.

Massing together, then, these instances, we have weighty lessons. First, let us ever keep distinctly before us that suffering and dying Manhood as the only ground of acceptable sacrifice and of full access and approach to God. Unless He has borne a true human nature through all the conflicts of life and all the agony of the Cross; unless the Man Jesus, by the offering of His blood, has prepared an access for us into the presence of God, we must for ever stand without. The true humanity of the Lord is the basis of His work of atonement, of intercession, and reconciliation.

Then, further, let us ever keep before our minds clear and plain that true Manhood of Jesus as being the type and pattern of the devout life. He is the Author and Finisher of faith, the first Example—though not first in order of time, yet in order of nature

and perfect in degree—the Pattern for us all, of the life, which says, “The life that I live I live by dependence upon God.” Christ, too, knows the path of suffering; but, more blessed still, Jesus is the Example, for all His friends and followers, of patient faith. His Manhood is sufficient for every human soul to find in it at once the Guide for all life and the Companion in it all.

It is strange and wonderful that the brief fragmentary record of a few years of a Galilean peasant’s life, surrounded by intellectual and social conditions utterly unlike those in which we live, and who Himself never traversed large tracts of human experience which we have to pass through, should yet stand as the adequate Guide and the all-sufficient Pattern for men. He is so, not by reason of the variety of His experiences, for it was a narrow sphere in which His humanity moved, but by reason of the purity of His motives, and the completeness of His self-abnegation. It is not necessary that a rule should supply all the instances to which it may be applied. It is not needful that a principle should be presented in all the diversity of its possible fields and consequences. Jesus Christ gives us, in the one perfect and continuous surrender of Himself to the will of God, the all-sufficient example for human conduct, as well as the all-sufficient stimulus and power to follow it. “The Breaker is gone up before us.” We have often to tread rough, dreary roads, but He has forced His path across the trackless snow, and amidst the ice-barriers, and we can tread safely in His footsteps. And if we think of Him as we tread, the solitude loses its terrors, and a most real and sweet companionship becomes

ours—if we are “looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.”

Then, again, let us set clearly before us that exalted Manhood as the pattern and pledge of the glory of the race. “We see not yet all things put under Him,” says the writer, commenting sadly on that 8th Psalm; and true it is that its raptures and exuberant words seem exaggerations and irony rather than the promise of anything that there is any symptom of our ever finding fulfilled. When we think of the vice and sin of the best; of the weaknesses of the strongest; of the decay of us all, the Psalmist’s burst seems to be all unfulfilled and unfulfillable. Where is the dominion over the works of His hands? Where is the crowning with glory and honour? Was it all a dream? “We see not yet all things put under Him,” and the slow-footed centuries drag their weary way along, and little progress seems to be made in bringing the ideal any nearer; but, says the writer, “We see Jesus, crowned with glory and honour.” Pessimism shrivels at the sight, and we cannot entertain too lofty views of the possibilities of humanity and the certainties for all who put their trust in Him. If He be crowned with glory and honour, the vision is fulfilled and the dream is a reality; and it shall be fulfilled in the rest of us who love Him.

So, brethren, Jesus has become Man that we may become sons of God like Him. And in the devout contemplation of the reality and the perfectness and universality of His Manhood are rooted the possibility of His sacrifice, the worth of His example, and all our hopes of glory. The name Jesus is the Foundation of all.

II.—Then, secondly, we have the name of office—Jesus is Christ.

Of course I take for granted that we all know that *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, of which *Anointed* is the English rendering. And I suppose I may take for granted, also, that we all understand that the significance of anointing in the older system was the communication of God-given power for God-appointed office. And so the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed, is the Person who comes to fulfil all the offices—Prophet, Priest, and King—which that ancient system imperfectly had; to be the true Sacrifice, the true Priest, the true Temple; to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords; to be the fulfilment and the theme of all prophecy, and the answer to the longings of a thousand generations. Judaism, like the aloe, bore, after long years, the single, bright, consummate flower, and then it died. Jesus Christ is the flower, the Man who is the Messiah.

Now the use of that name may naturally be expected to be very frequent in a letter the main object of which is to explain how Christianity is indeed the fulfilment and perfecting, and therefore the abolition, of Judaism. And, as a matter of fact, it is frequently employed, most frequently in cases where the main object of the writer is to set forth how all the types of the Old Testament found their realization, and more than realization, in the facts of the life of Jesus Christ. So we read of Him as the “Christ” who is the High Priest; as the “Christ” who is contrasted with Moses, as a son is with a servant; of the “Christ” by whose blood all the imperfect atonement, made by Jewish sacrifices, found its fulfilment

and its realization ; as the “ Christ ” in whose entering not into holy places made with hands, but into the presence of God in Heaven itself for us, the entrance of the High Priest of old within the veil into the sacred place of the Temple is more than fulfilled. And in all these instances you find this same idea present—viz., that in the whole sweep of Christ’s work regard is had to the former order, of which it is declared to be the accomplishment.

But it is instructive to notice that in several of the instances to which I have thus slightly referred we find the same things predicated of “ the Christ ” as we found declared of “ Jesus.” So, for instance, we read, when one aspect of His atonement is to be made prominent, that it is “ the blood of *Jesus* ” whereby we have confidence to enter into the holy place, and thus the Manhood, as the condition of His sacrifice, is brought into our thoughts ; and in another place we read that it is by “ the blood of Christ,” and not of typical animal sacrifices, that we draw nigh to God, whereby attention is fixed, not so much on the manhood as on the office, and on the contrast between the “ blood of bulls and goats,” which had no power, and that of Him who is the substance of which the earlier sacrifices were shadowy prophecies.

In like manner we read at one time of *Jesus* entering into the Holy Place, and in another of *Christ* entering there, where similarly, in the one form of expression the humanity is brought into prominence, that our manhood may triumph in it, and in the other the office is emphasized, that the relation of the perfect work of Christ to the imperfect ancient system may be more manifestly declared.

And so, brethren, I come to you with this question : Can you, like that verse that follows my text, put these two names together and think of Him as “Jesus Christ” ? Is your Jesus merely the man who, by the meek gentleness of His nature, the winning attractiveness of His persuasive speech, draws, and conquers, and stands manifested as the perfect Example of the highest form of Manhood, or is He the Christ, in whom the hopes of a thousand generations are realized, and the promises of God fulfilled, and the smoking altars and the sacrificing priests of that ancient system, and of heathenism everywhere, find their answer, their meaning, their satisfaction, their abrogation ? Is Jesus to you the Christ of God ?

III.—Lastly, we have the name of Divinity—Jesus the Christ is the Son of God.

Now that designation, either in its briefer form “the Son,” or in its fuller form “the Son of God,” is, we may say, a characteristic of this letter. The key-note is struck in the very first words. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” And then the writer goes on in a glorious flow of profound truth and lofty eloquence to set forth the majesty of this Son’s nature, and the wonderfulness of His relations to the whole world, who “being the effulgence of the Father’s glory, and the embodiment of His essence, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” That is the meaning of the name Son of God. It declares timeless being ; it declares that He is the very raying out of

the Divine glory. It declares that He is the embodiment and type of the Divine essence. So much for His nature. It declares that He "upholdeth all things by the word of His power." So much for His relation to universal creation. It declares that He by Himself purged our sins. So much for the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice and the power of the perpetual communication of His blood. It declares that He sitteth on the right hand of God. There is only one reference to the historic fact of the Resurrection in this letter. It is the point beyond the Resurrection, to which this writer, who hymns the praises of the Son, is ever looking, and that point is the exaltation of the Son of God, and in Him of the manhood of each of us, to the very throne and central seat of the universe. This is the Son to whom we are to look.

Jesus is this Son. Once, and once only, in the letter does the writer buckle together these two ideas which might seem to be antithetic, and at the utmost possible poles of opposition from each other; the lowly manhood and the wondrous Divinity. But they are united in Him who, by the union of them both, becomes the High Priest of our profession—Jesus, the Son of God.

Further, the name is employed in its contracted form to enhance the mystery and the mercy of His sharp sufferings and of His lowly endurance. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." The fuller form is employed to enhance the depth of the guilt and the dreadfulness of the consequences of apostasy, as in the solemn words about "crucifying the Son of God afresh," and in the awful appeal to our own judgments

to estimate of how sore punishment they are “worthy who trample under foot the Son of God.”

In like manner once or twice our letter speaks of Jesus as “Lord,” declaring thereby His Sovereignty, and setting forth our relation of dependence and submission. So in the words which I have taken for my text, and so once or twice besides.

And now I have finished this cursory and fragmentary attempt to set forth the various aspects under which this one letter puts Jesus Christ before us, and the upshot of the whole is just this—What think *ye* of Christ? Can you say—Jesus is the Anointed; the Anointed Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus the Anointed Son of God is my Lord? He is Jesus that we may feel a human heart beating near ours with sympathy born of human experience, and that we may have a human life for our perfect Example of goodness, and a human form on the throne of heaven for our Hope and our Forerunner. Jesus is the Christ. Then in Him we each may find the everliving Priest, the perfect Sacrifice, the true Temple, the accomplishment of the promises of heaven and the longings of generations. Jesus Christ is Son of God. Then we may bow before Him in adoration and worship at His feet unblamed. We may be sure of the worth of His sacrifice and the efficacy of His intercession. If He were not Son of God He could not be Christ, and His being named Jesus would be of no avail to us. His Divine nature guarantees the sinlessness of Jesus and the redeeming power of Christ. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Lord. Then we may see His hand moving the magnificence of the universe and the complications of human affairs, and may yield our happy

wills to His sway, and rest in peace on His sovereign power.

But all these names do not exhaust the depth of His being nor express the fulness of His grace. For in that final vision in the Apocalypse, when He goes forth in righteousness to judge and make war, though His uttered name be "the Word of God," and on His vesture and on His thigh is yet another name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords," there is still beyond these titles another Name, set, as it would seem, in light on the many flashing diadems which encircle His brow, and that Name "no man knoweth save Himself." We can never fathom, much less exhaust, the sweetness and fulness of this Jesus Christ. Only let us ponder the meaning of the names that we know, and with confident heart and unfaltering lips profess our faith in the ancient creed, "I believe in Jesus, the Christ, His only Son, our Lord."



III.

For the Sake of the Name.

“For His name’s sake.”—3 JOHN 7.



THE Revised Version gives the true force of these words by omitting the “His,” and reading merely “for the sake of the Name.” There is no need to say whose name. There is only one which could evoke the heroism and self-sacrifice of which the Apostle is speaking. The expression, however, is a remarkable one. The Name seems almost, as it were, to be personified. There are one or two other instances in the New Testament where the same usage is found, according to the true reading, though it is obscured in our Authorised Version, because it struck some early transcribers as being strange, and so they tried to mend and thereby spoiled it.

We read, for instance, in the true reading, in the Acts of the Apostles as to the disciples, on the first burst of persecution, that “they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for *the* Name.” And again, in Philippians, that in recompense and

reward for "His obedience unto death"—the Father hath given unto the Son—"the Name which is above every name." Once more, though less obviously, we find James speaking about "the worthy name by which we are called."

Then the other part of this phrase is quite as significant as this principal one. The word rendered "for the sake of," does not merely mean—though it does mean that—"on account of," or "by reason of," but "on behalf of," as if, in some wonderful sense, that mighty and exalted Name was furthered, advantaged, or benefited by even men's poor services. So, you see, a minute study of the mere words of the Scripture, though it may seem like grammatical trifling and pedantry, yields large results. Men do sometimes "gather grapes of thorns"; and the hard, dry work of trying to get at the precise shade of meaning in Scriptural words always repays us with large lessons and impulses. So let us consider the thoughts which naturally arise from the accurate observation of the very language here.

I.—And, first, let us consider the pre-eminence implied in "*the Name*."

Now I need not do more than remind you in a sentence that eminently in the old Testament, and also in the New, a name is a great deal more than the syllables which designate a person or a thing. It describes, not only who a man is, but what he is; and implies qualities, characteristics, either bodily or spiritual, which were either discerned in or desired for a person. So when the creatures are brought to Adam that he might give them names, that expresses the thought of the primitive man's insight into their

nature and characteristics. So we find our Lord changing the names of His disciples, in some cases in order to express either the deep qualities which His eye discerned lying beneath the more superficial ones, and to be evolved in due time, or declaring some great purpose which He had for them, official or otherwise.

So here the name substantially means the same thing as the Person Jesus. It is not the syllables by which He is called, but the whole character and nature of Him who is called by these syllables, that is meant by "the Name." The distinction between it, as so used, and Person, is simply that the former puts more stress on the qualities and characteristics as known to us.

Thus "the Name" means the whole Christ as we know Him, or as we may know Him, from the Book, in the dignity of His Messiahship, in the mystery of His Divinity, in the sweetness of His life, in the depth of His words, in the gentleness of His heart, in the patience and propitiation of His sacrifice, in the might of His resurrection, in the glory of His ascension, in the energy of His present life and reigning work for us at the right hand of God. All these, the central facts of the Gospel, are gathered together into that expression, *the Name*, which is the summing up in one mighty word, so to speak, which it is not possible for a man to utter except in fragments, of all that Jesus Christ is in Himself, and of all that He is and does for us.

It is but a picturesque and condensed way of saying that Jesus Christ, in the depth of His nature and the width of His work, stands alone, and is the

single, because the all-sufficient, Object of love and and trust and obedience. There is no need for a forest of little pillars ; as in some great chapter-house one central shaft, graceful as strong, bears the groined roof, and makes all other supports unnecessary and impertinent. There is one Name, and one alone, because in the depths of that wondrous nature, in the circumference of that mighty work, there is all that a human heart, or that all human hearts, can need for peace, for nobleness, for holiness, for the satisfaction of all desires, for the direction of efforts, for the stability of their being. The Name stands alone, and it will be the only Name that, at last, shall blaze upon the page of the world's history when the ages are ended ; and the chronicles of earth, with the brief "immortality" which they gave to other names of illustrious men, are moulded into dust. "The Name is above every name," and will outlast them all, for it is the all-sufficient and encyclopædiacal embodiment of everything that a single heart, or the whole race, can require, desire, conceive or attain.

So then, brethren, the uniqueness and solitariness of the name demands an equal and corresponding exclusiveness of devotion and trust in us. "Hear, O Israel ! The Lord thy God is *one* Lord. Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." And in like manner we may argue—There is one Christ, and there is none other but He. Therefore all the current of my being is to set to Him, and on Him alone am I to repose my undivided weight, casting all my cares and putting all my trust only on Him. Lean on none other. You

cannot lean too heavily on that strong arm. Love none other except in Him; for His heart is wide enough and deep enough for all mankind. Obey none other, for only His voice has the right to command. And lifting up our eyes, let us see "no man any more save Jesus only." That Name stands alone.

Involved in this, but worthy of briefly putting separately, is this other thought, that the pre-eminent and exclusive mention of the Name carries with it, in fair inference, the declaration of His Divine nature. It seems to me that we have here a clear case in which the Old Testament usage is transferred to Jesus Christ, only, instead of the Name being Jehovah, it is Jesus. It seems to me impossible that a man saturated as this Apostle was with Old Testament teaching, and familiar as he was with the usage which runs through it as to the sanctity of "the Name of the Lord," should have used such language as this of my text unless he had felt, as he has told us himself, that "the Word was God." And the very incidental character of the allusion gives it the more force as a witness to the common-placeness which the thought of the divinity of Jesus Christ had assumed to the consciousness of the Christian Church.

II.—But passing from that, let me ask you to look, secondly, at the power of the Name to sway the life.

I have explained the full meaning of the preposition in my text in my introductory remarks. It seems to me to cover both the ground of "on account of," or "by reason of," and "on behalf of."

Taking the word in the former of these two senses, note how this phrase, "for the sake of the Name,"

carries with it this principle, that in that Name, explained as I have done, there lie all the forces that are needed for the guidance and the impulses of life. In Him, in the whole fulness of His being, in the wonders of the story of His character and historical manifestation, there lies all guidance for men. He is the Pattern of our conduct. He is the Companion for us in our sorrow. He is the Quickener for us in all our tasks. And to set Him before us as our Pattern, and to walk in the paths that He dictates, is to attain to perfection. Whosoever makes "for the sake of the Name" the motto of his life will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

And not only is there guidance, but there is impulse, and that is better than guidance. For what men most of all want is a power that shall help or make them to do the things that they see plainly enough to be right.

And oh, brother, where is there such a force to quicken, to ennoble, to lead men to higher selves than their dead past selves, as lies in the grand sweep of that historical manifestation which we understand by the Name of Jesus? There is nothing else that will go so deep down into the heart and unseal the fountains of power and obedience as that Name. There is nothing else that will so strike the shackles off the prisoned will, and ban back to their caves the wild beasts that tyrannize within, and put the chain round their necks, as the Name of Jesus Christ. That is the Talisman that ennobles everything, that evokes undreamed-of powers, that "out of these stones," the hard and unsusceptible and obstinate wills of godless men, will "raise up children unto Abraham." This is

the secret that turns the heavy lead of our corrupt natures into pure gold.

And where does the impulsive power lie? Where, in that great continent, the whole life and work of Jesus Christ, is the dominant summit from which the streams run down? The Cross! The Cross! The Love that died for us, individually and singly, as well as collectively, is the thing that draws out answering love. And answering love is the untiring and omnipotent power that transmutes my whole nature into the humble aspiration to be like Him who has given Himself for me, and to render back myself unto Him for His gift. Brother, if you have not known the Name of Christ as the Name of the Divine Saviour who died on the Cross for you, you do not yet understand the power to transform, to ennoble, to energize, to impel to all self-sacrifice that lies in that name. In the fact of His death, and in the consequent fact of the communication of life from Him to each of us if we will, lie the great impulses which will blessedly and strongly carry us along the course which He marks out for us. And they who can say "For the sake of the Name" will live lives calm, harmonious, noble, and in some humble measure conformed to the serene and transcendent beauty to which they bow, and on which they rest. The impulse for a life—the only one that will last, and the only one that will lift—lies in the recognition of the Name. And so, let me remind you how our consequent simple duty is honestly, earnestly, prayerfully, always, to try to keep ourselves under the influence of that sweet compulsion and mighty encouragement which lie in the Name of Jesus Christ. How fragmentary, how interrupted,

how imperfect at the best are our yieldings to the power and the sweetness of the motives and pattern given to us in Christ's Name! How much of our lives would be all the same if Jesus Christ never had come, or if we never had believed in Him. Look back over your days, Christian men, and see how little of them has borne that stamp, and how slightly it has been impressed upon them.

Our whole life ought to be filled with His Name. You can write it anywhere. It does not need a gold plate to carve His Name upon. It does not need to be set in jewels and diamonds. The poorest scrap of brown paper, and the bluntest little bit of pencil, and the shakiest hand, will do to write the Name of Christ; and all life, the trivialities as well as the crises, may be flashing and bright with the sacred syllables. Mohammedans decorate their palaces and mosques with no pictures, but with the name of Allah, in gilded arabesques. Everywhere, on walls and roof, and windows and cornices, and pillars and furniture, the name is written. There is no such decoration for a life as that Christ's Name should be inscribed thereon.

III.—Lastly, notice the service that even we can do to the Name.

That, as I said, is the direct idea of the Apostle here. He is speaking about a very small matter. There were some anonymous Christian people who had gone out on a little missionary tour, and in the course of it, penniless and homeless, they had come to a city the name of which we do not know, and had been taken in and kindly entertained by a Christian brother, whose name has been preserved to us in this one letter. And, says John, these humble men went out

“on behalf of the Name”—to do something to further it, to advantage it! Jesus Christ, the bearer of the Name, was in some sense helped and benefited, if I may use the word, by the work of these lowly and unknown brethren.

Now there are one or two other instances in the New Testament where this same idea of the benefit accruing to the Name of Jesus from His servants on earth is stated, and I just point to them in a sentence in order that you may have all the evidence before you. There is the passage to which I have already referred, recording the disciples’ joy that they were “accounted worthy to suffer shame on behalf of the Name.” There are the words of Christ Himself in reference to Paul at His conversion, “I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name’s sake.” There is the church’s eulogium on Barnabas and Paul, as “men that have hazarded their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus.” There is Paul’s declaration that he is “ready, not only to be bound, but to die, on behalf of the Name of the Lord Jesus.” And in the introduction of the Epistle to the Romans he connects his apostleship with the benefit that thereby accrued to the Name of Christ. If we put all these together they just come to this, that, wonderful as it is, and unworthy as we are to take that great Name into our lips, yet, in God’s infinite mercy and Christ’s fraternal and imperial love, He has appointed that His Name should be furthered by the sufferings, the service, the life, and the death of His followers.

“He was extolled with my tongue,” says the Psalmist, in a rapture of wonder that any words of his could exalt God’s Name. So to you Christians is com-

mitted the charge of magnifying the Name of Jesus Christ. You can do it by your lives, and you can do it by your words, and you are sent to do both. We can "adorn the doctrine"; paint the lily and gild the refined gold, and make men think more highly of our Lord by our example of faithfulness and obedience. We can do it by our definite proclamation of His Name, which is laid upon us all to do, and for which facilities of varying degrees are granted. The inconsistencies of the professing followers of Christ are the strongest barriers to the world's belief in the glory of His Name. The Church as it is forms the hindrance rather than the help to the world's becoming a church. If from us sounded out the Name, and over all that we did, it was written blazing, conspicuous, the world would look and listen, and men would believe that there was something in the Gospel.

If you are a Christian professor, either Christ is glorified or put to shame in you, His saint; and either it is true of you that you do all things in the Name of the Lord Jesus and so glorify His Name, or that through you the Name of Christ is "blasphemed among the nations." Choose which of the two it shall be.



IV.

What the Sight of the Risen Christ makes Life and Death.

“After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.”—1 COR. xv. 6.



HERE were, then, some five-and-twenty years after the Resurrection, several hundred disciples who were known amongst the churches as having been eye-witnesses of the risen Saviour.

The greater part survived ; some, evidently a very few, had died. The proportion of the living to the dead, after five-and-twenty years, is generally the opposite. The greater part have “fallen asleep” ; some, a comparatively few, remain “unto this present.” Possibly there was some Divine intervention which supernaturally prolonged the lives of these witnesses, in order that their testimony might be the more lasting. But, be that as it may, they evidently were men of mark, and some kind of honour and observance surrounded them, as was very natural, and as appears from the fact that Paul here knows so accurately (and can appeal to His fellow-Christian’s accurate knowledge)

the proportion between the survivors and the departed. We read of one of them in the Acts of the Apostles at a later date than this, one Mnason, an "original disciple."

So we get a glimpse into the conditions of life in the early Church, interesting and of value in an evidential point of view. But my purpose at present is to draw your attention to the remarkable language in which the Apostle here speaks of the living and the dead amongst these witnesses. In neither case does he use the simple, common words "living" or "dead"; but in the one clause he speaks of their "remaining," and in the other of their "falling asleep"; both phrases being significant, and, as I take it, both being traced up to the fact of their having seen the risen Lord as the cause why their life could be described as a "remaining," and their death as a "falling asleep." In other words, we have here brought before us, by these two striking expressions, the transforming effect upon life and upon death of the faith in a risen Lord, whether grounded on sight or not. And it is simply to these two points that I desire to turn now.

I.—First, then, we have to consider what life may become to those who see the risen Christ.

"The greater part remain until this present." Now the word *remain* is no mere synonym for living or surviving. It not only tells us the fact that the survivors were living, but the kind of life that they did live. It is very significant that it is the same expression as our Lord used in the profound prophetic words, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Now we are told in John's Gospel that "that saying

went abroad amongst the brethren," and inasmuch as it was a matter of common notoriety in the early Church, it is by no means a violent supposition that it may be floating in Paul's memory here, and may determine his selection of this remarkable expression "they remain," or "they tarry," and they were tarrying till the Master came. So, then, I think if we give due weight to the significance of the phrase, we get two or three thoughts worth pondering.

One of them is that the sight of a risen Christ will make life calm and tranquil. Fancy one of these 500 brethren, after that vision, going back to his quiet rural home in some little village amongst the hills of Galilee. How small and remote from Him, and unworthy to ruffle or disturb the heart in which the memory of that vision was burning, would seem the things that otherwise would have been important and distracting! The faith which we have in the risen Christ ought to do the same thing for us, and will do it in the measure in which there shines clearly before that inward eye, which is our true means of apprehending Him, the vision which shone before the outward gaze of that company of wondering witnesses. If we build our nests amidst the tossing branches of the world's trees, they will sway with every wind, and perhaps be blown from their hold altogether by such a storm as we had last night. But we may build our nests in the clefts of the rock, like the doves, and be quiet, as they are. Distractions will cease to distract, and troubles will cease to agitate, and over all the heaving surface of the great ocean there will come a Form beneath whose feet the waves smooth themselves, and at whose voice the winds are still. They who see

Christ need not be troubled. The ship that is empty is tossed upon the ocean, that which is well laden is steady. The heart that has Christ for a passenger need not fear being rocked by any storm. Calmness will come with the vision of the Lord, and we shall abide, or "remain," for there will be no need for us to flee from this Refuge to that, nor shall we be driven from our secure abode by any contingencies. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

It is a good thing to cultivate the disposition that says about most of the trifles of this life, "it does not much matter"; but the only way to prevent wholesome contempt of the world's trivialities from degenerating into supercilious indifference is, to base it upon Christ, discerned as near us and bestowing upon us the calmness of His risen life. Make Him your scale of importance, and nothing will be too small to demand and be worthy of the best efforts of your work, but nothing will be too great to sweep you away from the serenity of your faith.

Again, the vision of the risen Christ will also lead to patient persistence in duty. If we have Him before us, the distasteful duty which He sets us will not be distasteful, and the small tasks, in which great faithfulness may be manifested, will cease to be small. If we have Him before us we have in that risen Christ the great and lasting Example of how patient continuing in well-doing triumphs over the sorrows that it bears, by, and in, patiently bearing them, and is crowned at last with glory and honour. The risen Christ is the Pattern for the men who will not be turned aside from the path of duty by any obstacles, dangers, or threats. The risen Christ is the signal

Example of glory following upon faithfulness, and of the crown being the result of the Cross. The risen Christ is the manifest Helper of them that put their trust in Him; and one of the plainest lessons and of the most imperative commands which come from the believing gaze upon that Lord who died because He would do the will of the Father, and is throned and crowned in the heavens because He died, is—By patient continuance in well-doing let us commit the keeping of our souls to Him: and abide in the calling wherewith we are called.

And, again, the sight of the risen Christ leads to a life of calm expectancy. “If I will that he *tarry* till I come” conveys that shade of meaning. The apostle was to wait for the Lord from Heaven, and that vision which was given to these 500 men sent them home to their abodes to make all the rest of their lives one calm aspiration for, and patient expectation of, the return of the Lord. These primitive Christians expected that Jesus Christ would come speedily. That expectation was disappointed in so far as the date was concerned, but after nineteen centuries it still remains true that all vigorous and vital Christian life must have in it, as a very important element of its vitality, the onward look which ever is anticipating, which often is desiring, and which constantly is confident of, the coming of the Lord from Heaven. The Resurrection has for its consequences, its sequel and corollary, first the Ascension; then the long tract of time during which Jesus Christ is absent, but still in human form rules the world; and, finally, His coming again in that same body in which the disciples saw Him depart from them. And no Christian life is up to the

level of its privileges, nor has any Christian faith grasped the whole articles of its creed, except that which sets in the very centre of all the visions of the future that great thought—He shall come again.

Questions of chronology have nothing to do with that. It stands there before us, the certain fact, made certain and inevitable by the past facts of the Cross and the Grave and Olivet. He has come, He will come; He has gone, He will come back. And for us the life that we live in the flesh ought to be a life of waiting for God's Son from Heaven, and of patient, confident expectance that when He shall be manifested we also shall be manifested with Him in glory. So much, then, for life—calm, persistent in every duty, and animated by that blessed and far-off, but certain, hope, and all of these founded upon the vision and the faith of a risen Lord. What have fears and cares and distractions and faint-heartedness and gloomy sorrow to do with the eyes that have beheld the Christ, and with the lives that are based on faith in the risen Lord?

II.—So, secondly, consider what death becomes to those who have seen Christ risen from the dead.

“Some are fallen asleep.” Now that most natural and obvious metaphor for death is not only a Christian idea, but is found, as would be expected, in many tongues, but yet with a strange and significant difference. The Christian reason for calling death a sleep embraces a great deal more than the heathen reason for doing so, and in some respects is precisely the opposite of that, inasmuch as to most others who have used the word, death has been a sleep that knew

no waking, whereas the very pith and centre of the Christian reason for employing the symbol is that it makes our waking sure. We have here what the act of dying, and what the condition of the dead become by virtue of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They have "fallen asleep." The act of dying is but a laying one's self down to rest, and a dropping out of consciousness of the surrounding world. It is very remarkable and very beautiful that the New Testament scarcely ever employs the words *dying* and *death* for the act of separating body and spirit, or for the condition either of the spirit parted from the body, or of the body parted from the spirit. It keeps those grim words for the reality, the separation of the soul from God; and it only exceptionally uses them for the shadow and the symbol, the physical fact of the parting of the man from the house which here he has dwelt in. But the reason why Christianity uses these periphrases or metaphors, these euphemisms for death, is the opposite of the reason why the world uses them. The world is so afraid of dying that it durst not name the grim, ugly thing. The Christian, or at least the Christian faith, is so little afraid of death that it does not think such a trivial matter worth calling by the name, but only names it "falling asleep."

Even when the circumstances of that dropping off to slumber are painful and violent, the Bible still employs the term. Is it not striking that the first martyr, kneeling outside the city, bruised by stones and dying a bloody death, should have been said to fall asleep? If ever there was an instance in which

the gentle metaphor seemed all inappropriate it was that cruel death, amidst a howling crowd, and with fatal bruises, and bleeding limbs mangled by the heavy rocks that lay upon them. But yet, "when he had said this he fell asleep." If that be true of such a death, no physical pains of any kind make the sweet word inappropriate for any.

We have here not only the designation of the act of dying, but that of the condition of the dead. They are fallen asleep, and they continue asleep. How many great thoughts gather round that metaphor on which it is needless for me to try to dilate! They will suggest themselves without many words to you all.

There lies in it the idea of repose. "They rest from their labours." Sleep restores strength, and withdraws a man at once from effort on the outer world, and from communications from it. We may carry the analogy into that unseen world. We know nothing about the relations to an external universe of the departed who sleep in Jesus. It may be that, if they sleep in Him, since He knows all, they through Him may know, too, something—so much as He pleases to impart to them—of what is happening here. And it may even be that, if they sleep in Him, and He wields the energies of Omnipotence, they, through Him, may have some service to do, even while they wait for the house which is from heaven. But there is no need nor profit in such speculations. It is enough that the sweet emblem suggests repose, and that in that sleep there are folded around the sleepers the arms of the Christ on whose bosom they rest, as an infant does on its first and happiest home, its mother's breast.

But then, besides that, the emblem suggests the idea of continuous and conscious existence. A man asleep does not cease to be a man; a dead man does not cease to live. It has often been argued from this metaphor that we are to conceive of the space between death and the resurrection as being a period of unconsciousness, but the analogies seem to me to be in the opposite direction. A sleeping man does not cease to know himself to be, and he does not cease to know himself to be himself. That mysterious consciousness of personal identity survives the passage from waking to sleep, as dreams sufficiently show us. And, therefore, they that sleep know themselves to be.

And, finally, the emblem suggests the idea of waking. Sleep is a parenthesis. If the night comes, the morning comes. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" They that sleep will awake, and be satisfied when they "awake with thy likeness." And so these three things—repose, conscious, continuous existence, and the certainty of awaking—all lie in that metaphor.

Now, then, the risen Christ is the only ground of such hope, and faith in Him is the only state of mind which is entitled to cherish it. Nothing proves immortality except that open grave. Every other foundation is too weak to bear the weight of such a superstructure. The current of present opinion shows, I think, that neither metaphysical nor ethical arguments for the future life will stand the force of the disintegrating criticism which is brought to bear upon that hope by the fashionable materialism of this genera-

tion. There is one barrier that will resist that force, and only one, and that is the historical facts that Jesus Christ died, and that Jesus Christ has risen again. He rose; therefore death is not the end of individual existence. He rose; therefore life beyond the grave is possible for humanity. He rose; therefore His sacrifice for the world's sin is accepted, and I may be delivered from my guilt and my burden. He rose; therefore He is declared to be the Son of God with power. He rose; therefore we, if we trust Him, may partake in His resurrection and in some reflection of His glory. The old Greek architects were often careless of the solidity of the soil on which they built their temples, and so, many of them have fallen in ruins. The Temple of Immortality can be built only upon the rock of that proclamation—Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. And we, dear brethren, should have all our hopes founded upon that one fact.

So then, for us, the calm, peaceful passage from life into what else is the great darkness is possible on condition of our having beheld the risen Lord. These witnesses of whom my text speaks, Paul would suggest to us, laid themselves quietly down to sleep, because before them there still hovered the memory of the vision which they had beheld. Faith in the risen Christ is the anchor of the soul in death, and there is nothing else by which we can hold then.

As the same Apostle, in one of His other letters, puts it, the belief that Christ is risen is not only the irrefragable ground of our hope that we, too, shall rise, but has the power to change the whole aspect of our

death. Did you ever observe the emphasis with which He says, "If we believe that Jesus *died* and rose again, even so them also which *sleep* in Jesus will God bring with Him"? His death was death indeed, and faith in it softens ours to sleep. He bore the reality that we might never need to know it. And if our poor hearts are resting upon that dear Lord, then the flames are but painted ones, and will not burn, and we shall pass through them, and no smell of fire will be upon us, and all that will be consumed will be the bonds which bind us. He has abolished death. The physical fact remains, but all which makes the idea of death to men is gone if we trust the risen Lord. So that, between two men dying under precisely the same circumstances, of the same disease, in adjacent beds in the same hospital, there may be such a difference as that the same word cannot be applied to the experiences of both.

My dear friends, we have each of us to pass through that last struggle; but we may make it either a quiet going to sleep with a loved Face bending over our closing eyes, like a mother's over her child's cradle, and the same Face meeting us when we open them in the morning of heaven; or we may make it a reluctant departure from all that we care for, and a trembling advance into all from which conscience and heart shrink.

Which is it going to be to you? The answer depends upon that to another question. Are you looking to that Christ that died and is alive for evermore as your life and your salvation? Do you hold fast that Gospel which Paul preached, "how that Christ

died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures" ? If you do, life will be a calm, persevering, expectant waiting upon Him, and death will be nothing more terrible than falling asleep.



V.

The Witness to Christ of the Oldest Christian Writing.

“I charge you, by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.”—1 THESS. v. 27.



IF the books of the New Testament were arranged according to the dates of their composition, this epistle would stand first. It was written somewhere about twenty years after the Crucifixion, and long before any of the existing Gospels. It is, therefore, of peculiar interest, as being the most venerable extant Christian document, and as being a witness to Christian truth quite independent of the Gospel narratives.

The little community at Thessalonica had been gathered together as the result of a very brief period of ministration by Paul. He had spoken for three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue, and had drawn together a Christian society, mostly consisting of heathens, though with a sprinkling of Jews amongst them. Driven from the city by a riot, he had left it for Athens, with many anxious thoughts, of course, as

to whether the infant community would be able to stand alone after so few weeks of his presence and instruction. Therefore he sent back one of his travelling companions, Timothy by name, to watch over the young plant for a little while. When Timothy returned with the intelligence of their steadfastness, it was good news indeed, and, with a sense of relieved anxiety, he sits down to write this letter, which, all through, throbs with thankfulness, and reveals the strain which the news had taken off his spirit.

There are no such definite doctrinal statements in it as in the most of Paul's longer letters; it is simply an outburst of confidence and love and tenderness, and a series of practical instructions. It has been called the least doctrinal of the Pauline Epistles. And in one sense, and under certain limitations, that is perfectly true. But the very fact that it is so makes its indications and hints and allusions the more significant; and if this letter, not written for the purpose of enforcing any special doctrinal truth, be so saturated as it is with the facts and principles of the Gospel, the stronger is the attestation which it gives to the importance of these. I have, therefore, thought it might be worth our while now, and might, perhaps, set threadbare truth in something of a new light, if we put this—the most ancient Christian writing extant, which is quite independent of the four Gospels—into the witness-box, and see what it has to say about the great truths and principles which we call the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is my simple design, and I gather the phenomena into three or four divisions for the sake of accuracy and order.

1.—First of all, then, let us hear its witness to the Divine Christ.

Look how the letter begins. “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” What is the meaning of that collocation, putting these two names side by side, unless it means that the Lord Jesus Christ sits on the Father’s Throne, and is Divine?

Then there is another fact that I would have you notice, and that is that more than twenty times in this short letter that great name is applied to Jesus, “the Lord.” Now mark that that is something more than a mere title of human authority. It is in reality the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament *Jehovah*, and is the transference to Him of that incommunicable Name.

And then there is another fact which I would have you weigh—viz., that in this letter direct prayer is offered to our Lord Himself. In one place we read the petition, “May our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way unto you,” where the petition is presented to both, and where both are supposed to be operative in the answer. And more than that, the word “direct,” following upon this *plural* subject, is itself a *singular* verb. Could language more completely express than that grammatical solecism does, the deep truth of the true and proper Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? There is nothing in any part of Scripture more emphatic and more lofty in its unfaltering proclamation of that fundamental truth of the Gospel than this altogether undoctinal epistle.

The Apostle does not conceive himself to be telling these men, though they were such raw and recent Christians, anything new when he presupposes the truth that Jesus Christ is to be thus linked with God, and that to Him desires and prayers may go. Thus the very loftiest apex of revealed religion had been imparted to that handful of heathens in the few weeks of the Apostle's stay amongst them. And nowhere upon the inspired pages of the fourth Evangelist, nor in that great Epistle to the Colossians, which is the very citadel and central fort of that doctrine in Scripture, is there more emphatically stated this truth than here, in these incidental allusions.

This witness, at any rate, declares, apart altogether from any other part of Scripture, that so early in the development of the Church's history, and to people so recently dragged from idolatry, and having received but such necessarily partial instruction in revealed truth, this had not been omitted, that the Christ in whom they trusted was the Everlasting Son of the Father. And it takes it for granted that, so deeply was that truth embedded in their new consciousness that an allusion to it was all that was needed for their understanding and their faith. That is the first part of the testimony.

II.—Now, secondly, let us ask what this witness has to say about the dying Christ.

There is no doctrinal theology in the Epistle to the Thessalonians, they tell us. Granted that there is no articulate argumentative setting forth of great doctrinal truths. But these are implied and involved in almost every word of it; and are definitely stated thus

incidentally in more places than one. Let us hear the witness about the dying Christ.

First, as to the fact, "The Jews killed the Lord Jesus." The historical fact is here set forth distinctly. And then, beyond the fact, there is as distinctly, though in the same incidental fashion, set forth the meaning of that fact—"God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us."

There at least are two things—one, the allusion, as to a well-known and received truth, proclaimed before now to them, that Jesus Christ in His death had died for them; and the other, that Jesus Christ was the medium through whom the Father had appointed that men should obtain all the blessings which are wrapped up in that sovereign word "salvation." I need but mention in this connection another verse, from another part of the letter, which speaks of Jesus as "He that delivereth us from the wrath to come." Remark that there our Authorised Version fails to give the whole significance of the words, because it translates *delivered*, instead of, as the Revised Version correctly does, *delivereth*. It is a continuous deliverance, running all through the life of the Christian man, and not merely to be realised away yonder at the far end; because by the mighty providence of God, and by the automatic working of the consequences of every transgression and disobedience, that "wrath" is ever coming, coming, coming towards men, and lighting on them, and a continual Deliverer, who delivers us by His death, is what the human heart needs. This witness is distinct that the death of Christ is a sacrifice, that the death of Christ is

man's deliverance from wrath, that the death of Christ is a present deliverance from the consequences of transgression.

And was that Paul's peculiar doctrine? Is it conceivable that in a letter in which he refers—once, at all events—to the churches in Judea as their “brethren,” he was proclaiming any individual or schismatic reading of the facts of the life of Jesus Christ? I believe that there has been a great deal too much made of the supposed divergencies of types of doctrine in the New Testament. There are such types, within certain limits. Nobody would mistake a word of John's calm, mystical, contemplative spirit for a word of Paul's fiery, dialectic spirit. And nobody would mistake either the one or the other for Peter's impulsive, warm-hearted exhortations. But whilst there are diversities in the way of apprehending, there are no diversities in the declaration of what is the central truth to be apprehended. These varyings of the types of doctrine in the New Testament are one in this, that all point to the Cross as the world's salvation, and declare that the death there was the death for all mankind.

Paul comes to it with his reasoning; John comes to it with his adoring contemplation; Peter comes to it with his mind saturated with Old Testament allusions. Paul declares that the “Christ died for us”; John declares that He is “the Lamb of God”; Peter declares that “Christ bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” But all make one unbroken phalanx of witness in their proclamation, that the Cross, because it is a cross of sacrifice, is a cross of reconciliation and peace and hope. And this is the Gospel that

they all proclaim, "how that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." And Paul could venture to say, "Whether it were they or I, so we preach, and so ye believed."

That was the Gospel that took these heathens, wallowing in the mire of sensuous idolatry, and lifted them up to the elevation and the blessedness of children of God.

And if you will read this letter, and think that there had been only a few weeks of acquaintance with the Gospel on the part of its readers, and then mark how the early and imperfect glimpse of it had transformed them, you will see where the power lies in the proclamation of the Gospel. A short time before they had been heathens; and now says Paul, "From you sounded out the Word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything." We do not need to talk to you about "love of the brethren," for "yourselves are taught of God to love one another, and my heart is full of thankfulness when I think of your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope." The men had been transformed. What transformed them? The message of a Divine and dying Christ, who had offered up Himself without spot unto God, and who was their peace and their righteousness and their power.

III.—Thirdly, notice what this witness has to say about the risen and ascended Christ. Here is what it has to say, "Ye turned unto God . . . to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead." And again, "The Lord Himself shall

descend from heaven with a shout." The risen Christ, then, is in the heavens. And Paul assumes that these people, just brought out of heathenism, have received that truth into their hearts in the love of it, and know it so thoroughly that he can take for granted their entire acquiescence in and acceptance of it.

Remember, we have nothing to do with the four Gospels here. Remember, not a line of them had yet been written. Remember, that we are dealing here with an entirely independent witness. And then tell us what importance is to be attached to this evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Twenty years after His death here is this man speaking about that Resurrection as being not only something that he had to proclaim, and believed, but as being the recognized and notorious fact which all the churches accepted, and which underlay all their faith.

I would have you remember that if, twenty years after the event, this witness was borne, it necessarily carries us back a great deal nearer to the event than the hour of its utterance, for there is no mark of its being new testimony at that instant, but every mark of its being the habitual and continuous witness that had been borne from the instant of the alleged Resurrection to that present time. It at least takes us back a good many years nearer the empty Sepulchre than the twenty which mark its date. It at least takes us back to the conversion of the Apostle Paul; and that necessarily involves, as it seems to me, that if that man, believing in the Resurrection, went into the Church, unless he had found there the same faith, there would have been an end of his association with them. The fact of the

matter is, there is not a place where you can stick a pin in, between the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the date of this letter, wide enough to admit of the rise of the faith in a Resurrection. We are necessarily forced by the very fact of the existence of the Church to the admission that the belief in the Resurrection was cotemporaneous with the alleged Resurrection itself.

And so we are shut up—in spite of the wriggling of people that do not accept that great truth—we are shut up to the old alternative, as it seems to me, that either Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or the noblest lives that the world has ever seen, and the loftiest system of morality that ever has been proclaimed, were built upon a lie. And we are called to believe that at the bidding of a mere unsupported, bare, dogmatic assertion that miracles are impossible. Believe it who will, I decline to be coerced into believing a blank, staring psychological contradiction and impossibility, in order to be saved the necessity of admitting the existence of the supernatural. I would rather believe in the supernatural than the ridiculous. And to me it is unspeakably ridiculous to suppose that anything but the fact of the Resurrection accounts for the existence of the Church and for the faith of this witness that we have before us.

And so, dear friends, we come back to this, the Christianity that flings away the risen Christ is a mere mass of tatters with nothing in it to cover a man's nakedness, an illusion with no vitality in it to quicken, to comfort, to ennoble, to raise, to teach aspiration or hope or effort. The human heart needs the "Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even

at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." And this independent witness confirms the Gospel story: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept."

IV.—Lastly, let us hear what this witness has to say about the returning Christ.

That is the characteristic doctrinal subject of the letter. We all know that wonderful passage of unsurpassed tenderness and majesty, which has soothed so many hearts and been like a gentle hand laid upon so many aching spirits, about the returning Jesus "coming in the clouds," with the dear ones that are asleep along with Him, and the reunion of them that sleep and them that are alive and remain, in one indissoluble concord and concourse, when we shall ever be with the Lord, and "clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over-measure for ever." The coming of the Master does not appear here with emphasis on its judicial aspect. It is rather intended to bring hope to the mourners, and the certainty that bands broken here may be re-knit in holier fashion hereafter. But the judicial aspect is not, as it could not be, left out. And the Apostle further tells us that "that day cometh as a thief in the night." That is a quotation of the Master's own words, which we find in the Gospels; and so again a confirmation, so far as it goes, from an independent witness, of the Gospel story. And then he goes on, in terrible language, to speak of "sudden destruction, as of travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

These, then, are the points of this witness's testi-

mony as to the returning Lord—a personal coming, a reunion of all believers in Him, in order to eternal felicity and mutual gladness, and the destruction that shall fall by His coming, upon those who turn away from Him.

What a revelation that would be to men who had known what it was to grope in the darkness of heathendom, and to have no light upon the future!

I remember once walking in the long galleries of the Vatican, on the one side of which there are Christian inscriptions from the catacombs, and on the other heathen inscriptions from the tombs. One side is all dreary and hopeless, one long sigh echoing along the line of white marbles—"Vale! vale! in æternum vale!" (Farewell, farewell, for ever farewell). On the other side, "In Christo, in Pace, in Spe" (In Christ, in peace, in hope). That is the witness that we have to lay to our hearts. And so death becomes a passage, and we let go the dear hands, believing that we shall clasp them again.

My brother! this witness is to a Gospel that is the Gospel for Manchester as well as for Thessalonica. You and I want just the same as these old heathens there wanted. We, too, need the Divine Christ, the dying Christ, the risen Christ, the ascended Christ, the returning Christ. And I beseech you to take Him for *your* Christ, in all the fulness of His offices, the manifoldness of His power, and the sweetness of His love, so that of you may be said, as this Apostle says about these Thessalonians, "Ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, as the word of God."

VI.

A Sheaf of Prayer Arrows.

“Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me : for I am poor and needy.

“Preserve my soul : for I am holy : O Thou my God, save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee.

“Be merciful unto me, O Lord ; for I cry unto Thee daily.

“Rejoice the soul of Thy servant : for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

“For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive ; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call unto Thee.”—PSALM lxxxvi. 1—5.



WE have here a sheaf of arrows out of a good man's quiver, shot into heaven. This series of supplications is remarkable in more than one respect. They all mean substantially the same thing, but the Psalmist turns the one blessing round in all sorts of ways, so great does it seem to him, and so earnest is his desire to possess it. They are almost all quotations from earlier psalms, just as our prayers are often words of Scripture, hallowed by many associations, and uniting us with the men of old who cried unto God and were answered.

The structure of the petitions is remarkably uniform. In each there are a prayer and a plea, and in

most of them a direct invocation of God. So I have thought that, if we put them all together now, we may get some lessons as to the invocations, the petitions, and the pleas of true prayer; or, in other words, we may be taught how to lay hold of God, what to ask from Him, and how to be sure of an answer.

I.—First, the lesson as to how to lay hold upon God.

The Divine names in this psalm are very frequent and significant, and the order in which they are used is evidently intentional. We have the great covenant name of *Jehovah* set in the very first verse, and in the last verse; as if to bind the whole together with a golden circlet. And then, in addition, it appears once in each of the other two sections of the psalm, with which we have nothing to do this morning. Then we have, further, the name of *God* employed in each of the sections; and, further, the name of *Lord*, which is not the same as *Jehovah*, but implies the simple idea of superiority and authority. In each portion of the psalm, then, we see the writer laying his hand, as it were, upon these three names—"Jehovah," "my God," "Lord"—and in all of them finding grounds for his confidence and reasons for his cry.

Nothing in our prayers is often more hollow and unreal than the formal repetitions of the syllables of that Divine name, often but to fill a pause in our thoughts. But to "call upon the Name of the Lord" means, first and foremost, to bring before our minds the aspects of His great and infinite character, which are gathered together into the Name by which we address Him. So when we say "*Jehovah!*"

“Lord!” what we ought to mean is this, that we are gazing upon that majestic, glorious thought of Being, self-derived, self-motived, self-ruled, the Being of Him Whose Name can only be, “I am that I am.” Of all other creatures the name is, “I am that I have been made,” or “I am that I became,” but of Him the Name is, “I am that I am.” Nowhere outside of Himself is the reason for His being, nor the law that shapes it, nor the aim to which it tends. And this infinite, changeless Rock is laid for our confidence, Jehovah the Eternal, and Self-subsisting, Self-sufficing One.

There is more than that thought in this wondrous Name, for it not only expresses the timeless, unlimited, and changeless Being of God, but also the truth that He has entered into what He deigns to call a Covenant with us men. The name Jehovah is the seal of that ancient Covenant, of which, though the form has vanished, the essence abides for ever, and God has thereby bound Himself to us by promises that cannot be abrogated. So that when we say, “O Lord,” we summon up before ourselves, and grasp as the grounds of our confidence, and we humbly present before Him as the motives, if we may so call them, for His action, His own infinite Being and His covenanted grace.

Then, further, our psalm invokes “*my* God.” That name implies in itself, simply, the notion of power to be revered. But when we add to it that little word “*my*,” we rise to the wonderful thought that the creature can claim an individual relation to Him, and in some wondrous sense a possession there. The tiny mica flake claims kindred with the Alpine peak from which it fell. The poor, puny hand, that can

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grasp so little of the material and temporal, can grasp all of God that it needs.

Then, there is the other name, "Lord," which simply expresses illimitable sovereignty, power over all circumstances, creatures, orders of being, worlds, and cycles of ages. Wherever He is He rules, and therefore my prayer can be answered by Him. When a child cries "Mother," it is more than all other petitions. A dear name may be a caress when it comes from loving lips. If we are the kind of Christians that we ought to be there will be nothing sweeter to us than to whisper to ourselves, and to say to Him, "Abba! Father!" See to it that your calling on the name of the Lord is not formal, but the true apprehension, by a believing mind and a loving heart, of the ineffable and manifold sweetnesses which are hived in His manifold names.

II.—Now, secondly, we have here a lesson as to what we should ask.

The petitions of our text, of course, only cover a part of the whole field of prayer. The Psalmist is praying in the midst of some unknown trouble, and his petitions are manifold in form, though in substance, as I have said, they may all be reduced to one. Let me run over them very briefly. "Bow down Thine ear and hear me." That is not the invocation simply of the Omniscience of a God, but an appeal for loving, attentive regard to the desires of His poor servant. The hearing is not merely the perception in the Divine mind of what the creature desires, but it is the answer in fact, or the granting of the petition. The best illustration of what the Psalmist wants here may be found in another Psalm, where another psalmist

tells us his experience and says, "My cry came unto His ears, and the earth shook and trembled." You put a spoonful of water into a hydraulic press at the one end, and you get a force that squeezes tons together at the other. Here there is a poor, thin stream of the voice of a sorrowful man at the one end, and there is an earthquake at the other. That is what "hearing" and "bowing down the ear" means.

Then the prayers go on to three petitions, which may be all regarded as diverse acts of deliverance or of help. "Preserve my soul." The word expresses the guardianship with which a garrison keeps a fortress. It is the Hebrew equivalent of the word employed by Paul—"The peace of God shall *keep* your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The thought is that of a defenceless man or thing round which some strong protection is cast. And the desire expressed by it is that in the midst of the sorrow, whatever it is, the soul may be guarded from evil. Then, the next petition—"save Thy servant"—goes a step further, and not only asks to be kept safe in the midst of the sorrows, but to be delivered out of them. And then the next petition—"Be merciful unto me, O Lord"—craves that the favour which comes down to inferiors, and is bestowed upon those who might deserve something far otherwise, may manifest itself, in such acts of strengthening, or help, or deliverance as Divine Wisdom may see fit.

And then the last petition is—"Rejoice the soul of Thy servant." The series begins with "hearing," passes through "preserving," "saving," showing "mercy," and comes at last to "rejoice the soul" that has been so harassed and troubled. Gladness is God's

purpose for us all ; joy we have all a right to claim from Him. It is the intended issue of every sorrow, and it can only be had when we cleave to Him, and pass through the troubles of life with continual dependence on and aspiration towards Himself.

So there are the petitions massed together, and out of them let me take two or three lessons. First, then, let us learn to make all wishes and annoyances material of prayer. This man was harassed by some trouble of which we do not know the nature ; and although the latter portion of his Psalm rises into loftier regions of spiritual desire, here, in the first part of it, he is wrestling with the afflicting circumstances, whatever they were, and he has no hesitation in spreading them all out before God and asking for His delivering help. Wishes that are not turned into prayers irritate, disturb, unsettle. Wishes that are turned into prayers are calmed and made blessed. Stanley and his men lived for weeks upon a poisonous root which, if eaten crude, brought all manner of diseases, but, steeped in running water, had all the acrid juices washed out of it, and became wholesome food. If you steep your wishes in the stream of prayer the poison will go out of them. Some of them will be suppressed, all of them will be hallowed, and all of them will be calmed. Troubles, great or small, should be turned into prayers. Breath spent in sighs is wasted ; turned into prayers it will swell our sails. If a man does not pray "without ceasing," there is room for doubt whether he ever prays at all. What would you think of a traveller who had a valuable cordial of which he only tasted a drop in the morning and another in the evening ; or who had a sure staff

on which to lean which he only employed at distant intervals on the weary march, and that only for a short time? Let us turn all that we want into petitions, and all that annoys us let us spread before God.

Learn, further, that earnest reiteration is not vain repetition. "Use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking," said ^{the}the Master. But the same Master "went away from them and prayed the third time, using the same words." As long as we have not consciously received the blessing, it is no vain reiteration if we renew our prayers that it may come upon our heads. The man who asks for a thing once, and then gets up from his knees and goes away, and does not notice whether he gets the answer or not, does not pray. The man who truly desires anything from God cannot be satisfied with one languid request for it. But, as the heart contracts with a sense of need, and expands with a faith in God's sufficiency, it will drive the same blood of prayer over and over again through the same veins; and life will be wholesome and strong.

Then learn, further, to limit wishes and petitions within the bounds of God's promises. The most of these supplications of our text may be found in other parts of Scripture, as promises from God. Only so far as an articulate Divine word carries my faith has my faith the right to go. In the crooked alleys of Venice there is a thin thread of red stone, inlaid in the pavement or wall, which guides through all the devious turnings to the Piazza, in the centre, where the great church stands. As long as we have the red

line of promise on the path, faith may follow it and it will come to the Temple. Where the line stops it is presumption, and not Faith, that takes up the running. God's promises are sunbeams flung down upon us. True prayer catches them on its mirror, and signals them back to God. We are emboldened to say, "Bow down Thine ear," because He has said, "I will hear." We are encouraged to cry, "Be merciful," because we have our foot upon the promise that He will be; and all that we can ask of Him is, Do for us what Thou hast said; be to us what Thou art.

The final lesson is, Leave God to settle how He answers your prayer. The Psalmist prayed for preservation, for safety, for joy; but he did not venture to prescribe to God *how* these blessings were to be ministered to him. He does not ask that the trouble may be taken away. That is as it may be; it may be better that it shall be left. But he asks that in it he shall not be allowed to sink, and that, however the waves may run high, they shall not be allowed to swamp his poor little cockle-shell of a boat. This is the true inmost essence of prayer—not that we should prescribe to Him how to answer our desires, but that we should leave all that in His hands. The Apostle Paul said, in his last letter, with triumphant confidence, that he knew that God would "deliver him and save him into His everlasting kingdom." And he knew, at the same time, that his course was ended, and that there was nothing for him now but the crown. How was he "saved into the kingdom" and "delivered from the mouth of the lion"? The sword that struck off the wearied head that had thought so long for God's Church was the instrument of the

deliverance and the means of the salvation. For us it may be that a sharper sorrow may be the answer to the prayer, "Preserve Thy servant." It may be that God's "bowing down His ear" and answering as when we cry shall be to pass us through a mill that has finer rollers, to crush still more the bruised corn. But the end and the meaning of it all will be to "rejoice the soul of the servant" with a deeper joy at last.

III.—Finally, mark the lesson which we have here as to the pleas that are to be urged, or the conditions on which prayer is answered.

"I am poor and needy," or, as perhaps the words more accurately mean, "afflicted and poor." The first condition is the sense of need. God's highest blessings cannot be given except to the men who know they want them. The self-righteous man cannot receive the righteousness of Christ. The man who has little or no consciousness of sin is not capable of receiving pardon. God cannot put His fulness into our emptiness if we conceit ourselves to be filled and in need of nothing. We must know ourselves to be poor and naked and blind and miserable ere He can make us rich and enlighten our eyes, and clothe us, and flood our souls with His own gladness. Our needs are dumb appeals to Him; and, in regard of all outward and lower things, they bind Him to supply, because they themselves have been created by Him. He that hears the raven's croak satisfies the necessities that He has ordained in man and beast. But, for all the best blessings of His providence and of His love, the first steps towards receiving them are the knowledge that we need them and the desire that we should possess them.

Then the Psalmist goes on to put another class of pleas derived from his relation to God. These are mainly two—"I am holy," and "Thy servant that trusteth in Thee." Now, with regard to that first word "holy," according to our modern understanding of the expression it by no means sets forth the Psalmist's idea. It has an unpleasant smack of self-righteousness, too, which is by no means to be found in the original. But the word employed is a very remarkable and pregnant one. It really carries with it, in germ, the great teaching of the Apostle John. "We love Him because He first loved us." It means one who, being loved and favoured by God, answers the Divine love with his own love. And the Psalmist is not pleading any righteousness of his own, but declaring that he, touched by the Divine love, answers that love, and looks up; not as if thereby he deserved the response that he seeks, but as knowing that it is impossible but that the waiting heart should thus be blessed. They who love God are sure that the answer to their desires will come fluttering down upon their heads, and fold its waiting wings and nestle in their hearts. Christian people are a great deal too much afraid of saying, "I love God." They rob themselves of much peace and power thereby. We should be less chary of so saying if we thought more about God's love to us, and poked less into our own conduct.

Again, the Psalmist brings this plea—"Thy servant that trusteth in Thee." He does not say, "I deserve to be answered because I trust," but "because I trust I am sure that I shall be answered"; for it is absurd to suppose that God will look down from Heaven on a

soul that is depending upon Him, and will let that soul's confidence be put to shame. Dear friend, if your heart is resting upon God, be sure of this, that anything is possible rather than that you should not get from Him the blessings that you need.

The Psalmist gathers together all his pleas which refer to himself into two final words—"I cry unto Thee daily," "I lift up my soul unto Thee"—which, taken together, express the constant effort of a devout heart, after communion with God. To withdraw my heart from the low levels of earth, and to bear it up into communion with God, is the sure way to get what I desire, because then God Himself will be my chief desire, and "they who seek the Lord shall not want any good."

But the true and prevailing plea is not in our needs, desires, or dispositions, but in God's own character, as revealed by His words and acts, and grasped by our faith. Therefore the Psalmist ends by passing from thoughts of self to thoughts of God, and builds at last on the sure foundation which underlies all his other "fors" and gives them all their force—"For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee."

Brethren, make all your wishes and all your annoyances into prayers. If a wish is not fit to be prayed about, it is not fit to be cherished. If a care is too small to be made a prayer, it is too small to be made a burden. Be frank with God as God is frank with you, and go to His Throne, keeping back nothing of your desires or of your troubles. To carry them there will take the poison and the pain out of wasps'

stings, and out of else fatal wounds. We have a Name to trust to, tenderer and deeper than those which evoked the Psalmist's triumphant confidence. Let us see to it that, as the basis of our faith is firmer, our faith be stronger than his. We have a plea to urge, more persuasive and mighty than those which he pressed on God and gathered to his own heart. "For Christ's sake" includes all that he pled, and stretches beyond it. If we come to God through Him who declares His name to us, we shall not draw near to the Throne with self-willed desires, nor leave it with empty hands. "If ye ask anything in My name, I will do it."



VII.

What a Good Man is, and how he becomes so.

“He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.”—
ACTS xi. 24.



“GOOD man.” How easily that title is often gained! There is, perhaps, no clearer proof that men are bad than the sort of people whom they consent to call good.

It is a common observation that all words describing moral excellence tend to deteriorate and to contract their meaning, just as bright metal rusts by exposure, or coins become light and illegible by use. So it comes to pass that any decently respectable man, especially if he has an easy temper, and a dash of frankness and good humour, is christened with this title “good.” The Bible, which is the verdict of the Judge, is a great deal more chary in its use of the word. You remember how Jesus Christ once rebuked a man for addressing Him so, not that He repudiated the title, but that the giver had bestowed it lightly and out of mere conventional politeness. The word is too noble to be applied without very good reason.

But here we have a picture of a good man hung in the gallery of Scripture portraits, with this label attached to it in the catalogue, "He was a good man."

You observe that my text is in the nature of an analysis. It begins at the outside, and works inwards. "He was a good man." Indeed! How came he to be so? He was "full of the Holy Ghost." Full of the Holy Ghost was he? How came he to be that? He was "full of faith." So the writer digs down, as it were, till he gets to the bed rock, on which all the higher strata repose; and here is his account of the way in which it is possible for human nature to win this resplendent title, and to be adjudged of God as "good." "Full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."

So these three steps in the exposition of the character and its secret will afford a framework for what I have to say now.

I.—Note, then, first, the sort of man whom the Judge will call "good."

Now, I suppose I need not spend much time in massing together, in brief outline, the characteristics of Barnabas. He was a Levite, belonging to the sacerdotal tribe, and perhaps having some slight connection with the functions of the Temple ministry. He was not a resident in the Holy Land, but a Hellenistic Jew, living in Cyprus, who had come into contact with heathenism in a way that had beaten many a prejudice out of him. We first hear of him as taking a share in the self-sacrificing burst of brotherly love, which, whether it was wise or not, was noble. "He, having land, sold it, and brought the

money, and laid it at the Apostle's feet." And, as would appear from a reference in one of Paul's letters, he had to support himself afterwards by manual labour.

Then the next thing that we hear of him is that, when the young man who had been a persecuting Pharisee, and the rising hope of the anti-Christian party, all at once came forward with some story of a vision which he had seen on the road to Damascus, and when the older Christians were suspicious of a trick to worm himself into their secrets by a pretended conversion, Barnabas, with the generosity of an unsuspicious nature, which often sees deeper into men than do suspicious eyes, was the first to cast the ægis of the protection of his recognition round him. In like manner, when Christianity took an entirely spontaneous and, to the church at Jerusalem, rather unwelcome new development and expansion, and some unofficial believers, without any authority from headquarters, took upon themselves to stride clean across the wall of separation, and to talk about Jesus Christ to blank heathens, and found, to the not altogether gratified surprise of the Christians at Jerusalem, "that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost," it was Barnabas that was sent down to look into this surprising new phenomenon, and we read that "when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad." The reason why he rejoiced over the manifestation of the grace of God in such a strange form was because "he was a good man," and goodness recognized goodness in others and was glad in the work of the Lord. The new condition of affairs sent him to look for Paul, and to put him to work.

Then we find him set apart to missionary service, and the leader of the first missionary band, in which he was accompanied by his friend Saul. He acquiesced frankly, and without a murmur, in the superiority of the junior, and yielded up pre-eminence to him quite willingly. The story of that missionary journey begins "Barnabas and Saul," but very soon it comes to be "Paul and Barnabas," and it keeps that order throughout. He was an older man than Paul, for when at Lystra the people thought that the gods had come down in the likeness of men, Barnabas was Jupiter, and Paul the quick-footed Mercury, messenger of the gods. He was in the work before Paul was thought of, and it must have taken a great deal of goodness to acquiesce in "he must increase and I must decrease." Then came the quarrel between them, the foolish fondness for his runaway nephew John Mark, whom he insisted on retaining in a place for which he was conspicuously unfitted. And so he lost his friend, the confidence of the church, and his work. He sulked away into Cyprus; he had his nephew, for whom he had given up all these other things. A little fault may wreck a life, and the whiter the character the blacker the smallest stain upon it.

We do not hear anything more of him. Apparently, from one casual allusion, he continued to serve the Lord in evangelistic work, but the sweet communion of the earlier days, and the confident friendship with the Apostle, seem to have come to an end with that sharp contention. So Barnabas drops out of the rank of Christian workers. And yet "he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."

Now I have spent more time than I meant over

this brief outline of the sort of character here pointed at. Let me just gather into one or two sentences what seem to me to be the lessons of it. The first is this, that the tap-root of all goodness is reference to God and obedience to Him. People tell us that morality is independent of religion. I admit that many men are better than their creeds, and many men are worse than their creeds; but I would also venture to assert that morality is the garment of religion; the body of which religion is the soul; the expression of religion in daily life. And although I am not going to say that nothing which a man does without reference to God has any comparative goodness in it, or that all the acts which are thus void of reference to Him stand upon one level of evil, I do venture to say that the noblest deed, which is not done in conscious obedience to the will of God, lacks its supreme nobleness. The loftiest perfection of conduct is obedience to God. And whatever excellence of self-sacrifice, "whatsoever things lovely and of good report," there may be, apart from the presence of this perfect motive, those deeds are imperfect. They do not correspond either to the whole obligations or to the whole possibilities of man, and, therefore, they are beneath the level of the highest good. Good is measured by reference to God.

Then, further, let me mark that one broad feature which characterizes the truest goodness is the suppression of self. That is only another way of saying the same thing as I have been saying. It is illustrated for us all through this story of Barnabas. Whosoever can say, "I think not of myself, but of

others; of the cause, of the help I can give to men; and I lay not goods only, nor prejudices only, nor the pride of position and the supremacy of place only at the feet of God, but I lay down my whole self; and I desire that self may be crucified, that God may live in me,"—he, and only he, has reached the height of goodness. Goodness requires the suppression of self.

Further, note that the gentler traits of character are pre-eminent in Christian goodness. There is nothing about this man heroic or exceptional. His virtues are all of the meek and gracious sort—those which we relegate sometimes to an inferior place in our estimates. These things make but a poor show by the side of some of the tawdry splendours of what the vulgar world calls virtues. It requires an educated eye to see the harmony of the sober colouring of some great painter. A child, a clown, a vulgar person, who may be a rich person and educated, will prefer flaring reds and blues and yellows heaped together in staring contrast. A thrush or a blackbird is but a soberly-clad creature by the side of macaws and paroquets; but the one has a song and the other has only a screech. The gentle virtues are the truly Christian virtues: patience and meekness and long-suffering and sympathy and readiness to efface one's self for the sake of God and of men.

So there is a bit of comfort for us commonplace, humdrum people, to whom God has only given one or two talents, and who can never expect to make a figure before men. We may be little violets below a stone, if we cannot be flaunting hollyhocks and tiger lilies. We may have the beauty of goodness in us

after Christ's example, and that is better than to be great.

Barnabas was no genius. He was not even a genius in goodness; he did not strike out anything original and out of the way. He seems to have been a commonplace kind of man enough; but "he was a good man." And the weakest and the humblest of us may hope to have the same thing said of us if we will.

And then, note further, that true goodness, thank God! does not exclude the possibility of falling and sinning. There is a black spot in this man's history; and there are black spots in the histories of all saints. Thank God! the Bible is, as some people would say, almost brutally frank in telling us about the imperfections of the best. Very often imperfections are the exaggerations of characteristic goodnesses, warning us to take care that we do not push, as Barnabas did, our facility to the point of criminal complicity with weaknesses; and that we do not indulge, instead of strenuously rebuking, if need be. Never let the gentleness fall away, like a badly made jelly, into a trembling heap, and never let the strength gather itself together into a repulsive attitude, but guard against the exaggeration of virtue into vice.

Remember that whilst there may be good men who sin, there is One entire and flawless, in whom all types of excellence do meet, and who alone of humanity can front the verdict of the world, and has fronted it now for nineteen centuries, with the question upon His lips, which none have dared to answer, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?"

II.—Secondly, notice the Divine Helper who makes men good.

Luke, if he be the writer of the Acts, goes on with his analysis. He has done with the first fold, the outer garment as it were ; he strips it off and shows us the next fold, “full of the Holy Ghost.”

A Divine Helper, not merely a Divine influence, but a Divine Person, who not only helps men from without, but so enters into a man as that the man’s whole nature is saturated with Him—that is strange language. Mystical and unreal I dare say some of you may think it, but let us consider whether some such Divine Helper is not plainly pointed as necessary, by the experience of every man that ever honestly tried to make himself good.

I have no doubt that I am speaking to many persons this evening who, more or less constantly and courageously and earnestly, have laboured at the task of self-improvement and self-culture. I venture to think that, if their standard of what they wish to attain is high, their confession of what they have attained will be very low. Ah, brother ! if we think of what it is that we need to make us good—viz., the strengthening of these weak wills of ours, which we cannot strengthen but to a very limited degree by any tonics that we can apply, or any supports with which we may bind them round ; if we consider the resistance which ourselves, our passions, our tastes, our habits, our occupations offer, and the resistance which the world around us, friends, companions, and all the aggregate, dread and formidable, of material things present to our becoming, in any lofty and comprehensive sense of the term, good men and women, I think

we shall be ready to listen, as to a true Gospel, to the message that says, "You do not need to do it by yourself." You have got the wolf by the ears, perhaps, for a moment, but there is tremendous strength in the brute, and your hands and wrists will ache in holding him presently, and what will happen then? You do not need to try it yourself. There is a Divine Helper standing at your sides and waiting to strengthen you, and that Helper does not work from outside; He will pass within, and dwell in our hearts and mould and strengthen our wills to what is good, and suppress our inclinations to evil, and, by His inward presence, teach "our hands to war and our fingers to fight."

Surely, surely, the experience of the world from the beginning, confirmed by the consciousness and conscience of every one of us, tells us that of ourselves we are impotent, and that the good that is within the reach of our unaided efforts is poor and fragmentary and superficial indeed.

The great promise of the Gospel is precisely this promise. We terribly limit and misunderstand what we call the Gospel if we give such exclusive predominance to one part of it, as some of us are accustomed to do. Thank God! the first word that Jesus Christ says to any soul is, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." But that first word has a second that follows it, "Arise! and walk!" and it is for the sake of the second that the first is spoken. The gift of pardon, the consciousness of acceptance, the fact of reconciliation with God, the closing of the doors of the place of retribution, the quieting of the stings of accusing conscience, all these are but meant to be

introductory to that which Jesus Christ Himself, in the Gospel of John, emphatically calls more than once "*the* gift of God," which He symbolized by "living water," which whosoever drank should never thirst, and which whosoever possessed would give it forth in living streams of holy life and noble deeds. The promise of the Gospel is the promise of new life, derived from Christ and maintained in us by the indwelling Spirit, which shall come like fresh reinforcements to an all but beaten army, in some hard fought field, which shall come like a stay behind a man, to us almost blown over by the gusts of temptation, which shall strengthen what is weak, raise what is low, illumine what is dark, and shall make us who are evil good with a goodness given by God through His Son.

Surely there is nothing more congruous with that Divine character than that He who Himself is good, and good from Himself, should rejoice in making us, His poor children, into His own likeness. Surely He would not be good unless He delighted to make us good. Surely it is something very like presumption in men to assert that the direct communication of the Spirit of God with the spirits whom God has made is an impossibility. Surely it is flying in the face of Scripture teaching to deny that it is a promise. Surely it is a flagrant contradiction of the depths of Christian experience to falter in the belief that it is a very solid reality.

"Full of the Holy Ghost," as a vessel might be to its brim of golden wine! Christian men and women! does that describe you? Full! A dribbling drop or two in the bottom of the jar: whose fault is it?

Why, with that rushing mighty wind to fill our sails if we like, should we be lying in the sickly calms of the tropics, with the pitch oozing out of the seams, and the idle canvas flapping against the mast? Why, with those tongues of fire hovering over our heads, should we be cowering over grey ashes in which there lives a little spark? Why, with that great rushing tide of the river of the water of life, should we be like the dry watercourses of the desert, with bleached and white stones baking where the stream should be running? “Oh! Thou that art named the House of Israel, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?”

III.—And so, lastly, we are shown how that Divine Helper comes to men.

“Full of the Holy Ghost, *and of faith.*” There is no goodness without the impulse and indwelling of the Divine Spirit, and there is no Divine Spirit to dwell in a man’s heart without that man’s trusting in Jesus Christ. The condition of receiving the gift that makes men good is simply and solely that we should put our trust in Jesus Christ the Giver. That opens the door and the Divine Spirit enters.

True! there are convincing operations which He effects upon the world; but these are not in question here. These come prior to, and independent of, faith. But the work of the Spirit of God, present within us to heal and hallow us, has as condition our trust in Jesus Christ the Great Healer. If you open a chink, the water will come in. If you trust in Jesus Christ, He will give you the new life of His Spirit, which will make you free from the law of sin and death. That Divine Spirit “which they that believe in Him should

receive" delights to enter into every heart where His presence is desired. Faith is desire; and desires rooted in faith cannot be in vain. Faith is expectation; and expectations based upon the Divine promise can never be disappointed. Faith is dependence, and dependence that reckons upon God, and upon God's gift of His Spirit, will surely be recompensed.

The measure in which we possess the power that makes us good depends altogether upon ourselves. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." You may have as much of God as you want, and as little as you will. The measure of your faith will determine at once the measure of your goodness, and of your possession of the Spirit that makes good. Just as when the prophet miraculously increased the oil in the cruse, the golden stream flowed as long as they brought vessels, and stayed when there were no more, so as long as we open our hearts for the reception, the gift will not be withheld, but God will not let it run like water spilled upon the ground that cannot be gathered up. If we will desire, if we will expect, if we will reckon on, if we will look to Jesus Christ, and, beside all this, if we will honestly use the power that we possess, our capacity will grow, and the gift will grow, and our holiness and purity will grow with it.

Some of you have been trying, more or less continuously, all your lives to mend your own characters and improve yourselves. Brethren! There is a better way than that. A modern poet says,

"Self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control,
These three alone lift life to sovereign power."

Taken by itself that is pure heathenism. Self cannot

improve self. Put self into God's keeping, and say, "I cannot guard, keep, purge, hallow mine own self. Lord, do Thou do it for me." It is no use to try to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven. A ladder has been let down on which we may pass upwards, and by which God's angels of grace and beauty will come down to dwell in our hearts. If the Judge is to say of each of us, "He was a good man," He must also be able to say, "He was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."



VIII.

Secret Faults.

“Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults.”—PSALM xix. 12.



THE contemplation of the “perfect law, enlightening the eyes,” sends the Psalmist to his knees. He is appalled by His own shortcomings, and feels that, beside all those of which he is aware, there is a region, as yet unilluminated by that law, where evil things nestle and breed.

The Jewish ritual drew a broad distinction between inadvertent—whether involuntary or ignorant—and deliberate sins; providing atonement for the former, not for the latter. The word in my text rendered “errors” is closely connected with that which in the Levitical system designates the former class of transgressions; and the connection between the two clauses of the text, as well as that with the subsequent verse, distinctly shows that the “secret faults” of the one clause are substantially synonymous with the “errors” of the other.

They are, then, not sins hidden from men, whether because they have been done quietly in a corner, and

remain undetected, or because they have only been in thought, never passing into act. Both of these pages are dark in every man's memory. Who is there that could reveal himself to men? who is there that could bear the sight of a naked soul? But the Psalmist is thinking of a still more solemn fact, that, beyond the range of conscience and consciousness, there are evils in us all. It may do us good to ponder his discovery that he had undiscovered sins, and to take for ours his prayer, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

I.—So I ask you to look with me, briefly, first, at the solemn fact here, that there are in every man sins of which the doer is unaware.

It is with our characters as with our faces. Few of us are familiar with our own appearance, and most of us, if we have looked at our portraits, have felt a little shock of surprise, and been ready to say to ourselves, "Well! I did not know that I looked like that!" And the bulk even of good men are almost as much strangers to their inward physiognomy as to their outward. They see themselves in their looking-glasses every morning, although they "go away and forget what manner of men" they were. But they do not see their true selves in the same fashion in any other mirror.

It is the very characteristic of all evil that it has a strange power of deceiving a man as to its real character; like the cuttle-fish, that squirts out a cloud of ink and so escapes in the darkness and the dirt. The more a man goes wrong the less he knows it. Conscience is loudest when it is least needed, and most silent when most required.

Then, besides that, there is a great part of every-

body's life which is mechanical, instinctive—all but involuntary. Habits and emotions and passing impulses very seldom come into men's consciousness, and an enormously large proportion of everybody's life is done with the minimum of attention, and is as little remembered as it is observed.

Then, besides that, conscience wants educating. You see that on a large scale, for instance, in the history of the slow progress which Christian principle has made in leavening the world's thinkings. It took eighteen centuries to teach the Church that slavery was unchristian. The Church has not yet learned that war is unchristian, and it is only beginning to surmise that possibly Christian principle may have something to say in social questions, and in the determination, for example, of the relations of capital and labour, and of wealth and poverty. The very same slowness of apprehension and gradual growth in the education of conscience, and in the perception of the application of Christian principles to duty, applies to the individual as to the Church.

Then, besides that, we are all biased in our own favour, and what, when another man says it, is "flat blasphemy," we think, when we say it, is only "a choleric word." We have fine names for our own vices, and ugly ones for the very same vices in other people. David will flare up into generous and sincere indignation about the man that stole the poor man's ewe lamb, but he has not the ghost of a notion that he has been doing the very same thing himself. And so we bribe our consciences as well as neglect them, and they need to be educated.

Thus, down below every life there lies a great dim

region of habits and impulses and fleeting emotions, into which it is the rarest thing for a man to go with a candle in his hand to see what it is like.

But I can imagine a man saying, "Well, if I do not know that I am doing wrong, how can it be a sin?" In answer to that, I would say that, thank God! ignorance diminishes criminality, but ignorance does not alter the nature of the deed. Take a simple illustration. Here is a man who, all unconsciously to himself, is allowing worldly prosperity to sap his Christian character. He does not know that the great current of his life has been turned aside, as it were, by that sluice, and is taken to drive the wheels of his mill, and that there is only a miserable little trickle coming down the river bed. Is he any less guilty because he does not know? Is he not the more so, because he might and would have known if he had thought and felt right? Or, here is another man who has the habit of letting his temper get the better of him. He calls it "stern adherence to principle," or "righteous indignation"; and he thinks himself very badly used when other people "drive him" so often into a temper. Other people know, and *he* might know, if he would be honest with himself, that, for all his fine names, it is nothing else than passion. Is he any the less guilty because of his ignorance? It is plain enough that, whilst ignorance, if it is absolute and inevitable, does diminish criminality to the vanishing point, the ignorance of our own faults which most of us display is neither absolute nor inevitable; and, therefore, though it may, thank God! diminish, it does not destroy our guilt. "She wipeth her mouth and saith, I have done no harm." Was she, therefore, chaste and pure?

In all our hearts there are many vermin lurking beneath the stones, and they are none the less poisonous because they live and multiply in the dark. "I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified. But he that judgeth me is the Lord."

II.—Now, secondly, let me ask you to look at the special perilousness of these hidden faults.

As with a blight upon a rose-tree, the little green creatures lurk on the underside of the leaves, and in all the folds of the buds, and, because unseen, they increase with alarming rapidity. The very fact that we have faults in our characters, which everybody sees but ourselves, makes it certain that they will grow unchecked, and so will prove terribly perilous. The small things of life are the great things of life. For a man's character is made up of them, and of their results, striking inwards upon himself. A wine-glassful of water with one drop of mud in it may not be much obscured, but if you come to multiply it into a lakeful, you will have muddy waves that reflect no heavens, and show no gleaming stars.

These secret faults are like a fungus that has grown in a wine-cask, whose presence nobody suspected. It sucks up all the generous liquor to feed its own filthiness, and, when the staves are broken, there is no wine left, nothing but the foul growth. Many a Christian man and woman has the whole Christian life arrested, and all but annihilated, by the unsuspected influence of a secret sin. I do not believe it would be exaggeration to say that, for one man who has made shipwreck of his faith and lost his peace by reason of some gross transgression, there are twenty who have fallen into the same condition by reason of the multitude of small

ones. "He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little ;" and whilst the deeds which the Ten Commandments rebuke are damning to a Christian character, still more perilous, because unseen, and permitted to grow without check or restraint, are these unconscious sins. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."

III.—Notice the discipline, or practical issues, to which such considerations should lead.

To begin with, they ought to take down our self-complacency, if we have any, and to make us feel that, after all, our characters are very poor things. If men praise us, let us try to remember what it will be good for us to remember, too, when we are tempted to praise ourselves—the underworld of darkness which each of us carries about within us.

Further, let me press upon you two practical points. This whole set of contemplations should make us practise a very rigid and close self-inspection. There will always be much that will escape our observation—we shall gradually grow to know more and more of it—but there can be no excuse for that which I fear is a terribly common characteristic of the professing Christianity of this day—the all but entire absence of close inspection of one's own character and conduct. I know very well that it is not a wholesome thing for a man to be always poking in his own feelings and emotions. I know also that, in a former generation, there was far too much introspection, instead of looking to Jesus Christ and forgetting self. I do not believe that self-examination, directed to the discovery of reasons for trusting the sincerity of my own faith, is a good thing. But I do believe that, without the prac-

tice of careful weighing of ourselves, there will be very little growth in anything that is noble and good.

The old Greeks used to preach, "Know thyself." It was a high behest, and very often a very vain-glorious one. A man's best means of knowing what he is is to take stock of what he does. If you will put your conduct through the sieve, you will come to a pretty good understanding of your character. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls," into which all enemies can leap unhindered, and out from which all things that will may pass. Do you set guards at the gates and watch yourselves with all carefulness.

Then, again, I would say we must try to diminish as much as possible the mere instinctive and habitual and mechanical part of our lives, and to bring, as far as we can, every action under the conscious dominion of principle. The less we live by impulse, and the more we live by intelligent reflection, the better it will be for us. The more we can get habit on the side of goodness, the better; but the more we break up our habits, and make each individual action the result of a special volition of the spirit guided by reason and conscience, the better for us all.

Then, again, I would say, set yourselves to educate your consciences. They need that. One of the surest ways of making conscience more sensitive is always to consult it and always to obey it. If you neglect it, and let it prophesy to the wind, it will stop speaking before long. Herod could not get a word out of Christ when he "asked Him many questions" because for years he had not cared to hear His voice. And conscience, like the Lord of conscience, will hold its peace

after men have neglected its speech. You can pull the clapper out of the bell upon the rock, and then, though the waves may dash, there will not be a sound, and the vessel will drive straight on to the black teeth that are waiting for it. Educate your conscience by obeying it, and by getting into the habit of bringing everything to its bar.

And, still further, compare yourselves constantly with your model. Do as the art students do in a gallery, take your poor daub right into the presence of the masterpiece, and go over it line by line and tint by tint. Get near Jesus Christ that you may learn your duty from Him, and you will find out many of the secret sins.

And, lastly, let us ask God to cleanse us.

My text, as translated in the Revised Version, says, "*Clear* Thou me from secret faults." And there is present in that word, if not exclusively, at least predominantly, the idea of a judicial acquittal, so that the thought of the first clause of this verse seems rather to be that of pronouncing guiltless, or forgiving, than that of delivering from the power of. But both, no doubt, are included in the idea, as both, in fact, come from the same source and in response to the same cry.

And so we may be sure that, though our eye does not go down into the dark depths, God's eye goes, and that where He looks He looks to pardon, if we come to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

He will deliver us from the power of these secret faults, giving to us that Divine Spirit which is "the candle of the Lord," to search us, and to convince of our sins, and to drag our evil into the light; and

giving us the help without which we can never overcome. The only way for us to be delivered from the dominion of our unconscious faults is to increase the depth and closeness and constancy of our communion with Jesus Christ; and then they will drop away from us. Mosquitoes and malaria, the one unseen in their minuteness, and the other, "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," haunt the swamps. Go up on the hill top, and neither of them are found. So if we live more and more on the high levels, in communion with our Master, there will be fewer and fewer of these unconscious sins buzzing and stinging and poisoning our lives, and more and more will His grace conquer and cleanse.

They will all be manifested some day. The time comes when He shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness and the counsels of men's hearts. There will be surprises on both hands of the Judge. Some on the right, astonished, will say, "Lord, when saw we Thee?" and some on the left, smitten with confusion and surprise, will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name?"

Let us go to Him with the prayer, "Search me, O God, and try me; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."



IX.

Open Sins.

“Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”—PSALM xix. 13.



ANOTHER psalmist promises to the man who dwells “in the secret place of the Most High” that “he shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh at noonday,” but shall “tread upon the lion and adder.” These promises divide the dangers that beset us into the same two classes as our psalmist does—the one secret; the other palpable and open. The former, which, as I explained in my last sermon, are sins hidden, not from others, but from the doer, may fairly be likened to the pestilence that stalks slaying in the dark, or to the stealthy, gliding serpent, which strikes and poisons before the naked foot is aware. The other resembles the “destruction that wasteth at noonday,” or the lion with its roar and its spring, as, disclosed from its covert, it leaps upon the prey.

Our present text deals with the latter of these

two classes. "Presumptuous sins" does not, perhaps, convey to an ordinary reader the whole significance of the phrase, for it may be taken to define a single class of sins—namely, those of pride or insolence. What is really meant is just the opposite of "secret sins"—all sorts of evil which, whatever may be their motives and other qualities, have this in common, that the doer, when he does them, knows them to be wrong.

The Psalmist gets this further glimpse into the terrible possibilities which attach even to a servant of God, and we have in our text these three things—a danger discerned; a help sought; and a daring hope cherished.

I.—Note, then, the first of these, the dreaded and discerned danger—"presumptuous sins" which may "have dominion over" us, and lead us at last to a "great transgression."

Now the word which is translated "presumptuous" literally means *that which boils or bubbles*; and it sets very picturesquely before us the movement of hot desires—the agitation of excited impulses or inclinations which hurry men into sin in spite of their consciences. It is also to be noticed that the prayer of my text, with singular pathos and lowly self-consciousness, is the prayer of "Thy servant," who knows himself to be a servant, and who therefore knows that these glaring transgressions, done in the teeth of conscience and consciousness, are all inconsistent with his standing and his profession, but yet are perfectly possible for him.

An old mediæval mystic once said, "There is nothing weaker than the devil stripped naked."

Would it were true ! For there is one thing that is weaker than a discovered devil, and that is my own heart. For we all know that sometimes, with our eyes open, and the most unmistakable consciousness that what we are doing was wrong, we have set our teeth and done it, Christian men though we may profess to be, and may really be. All such conduct is inconsistent with Christianity ; but we are not to say, Therefore, that it is incompatible with Christianity. Thank God ! that is a very different matter. But as long as you and I have two things—viz., strong and hot desires, and weak and flabby wills—so long shall we, in this world full of combustibles, not be beyond the possibility of a dreadful conflagration being kindled by some devil-blown sparks. There are plenty of dry sticks lying about to put under the cauldron of our hearts, to make them boil and bubble over ! And we have, alas ! but weak wills, which do not always keep the reins in their hands as they ought to do, nor coerce these lower parts of our nature into their proper subordination. Fire is a good servant, but a bad master ; and we are all of us too apt to let it become master, and then the whole “course of nature” is “set on fire of hell.” The servant of God may yet, with open eyes and obstinate disregard of his better self, and of all its remonstrances, go straight into “presumptuous sin.”

Another step is here taken by the Psalmist. He looks shrinkingly and shudderingly into a possible depth, and he sees, going down into the abyss, a ladder with three rungs on it. The topmost one is wilful, self-conscious transgression. But that is not the lowest stage ; there is another step. Presumptuous

sin tends to become despotic sin. "Let them not *have dominion* over me." A man may do a very bad thing once, and get so wholesomely frightened, and so keenly conscious of the disastrous issues, that he will never go near it again. The prodigal would not be in a hurry, you may depend upon it, to try the swine trough and the far country, and the rags, and the fever, and the famine any more. David got a lesson that he never forgot in that matter of Bathsheba. The bitter fruit of his sin kept growing up all his life, and he had to eat it, and that kept him right. They tell us that broken bones are stronger at the point of fracture than they were before. And it is possible for a man's sin—if I might use a paradox which you will not misunderstand—to become the instrument of his salvation.

But there is another possibility quite as probable, and very often recurring, and that is that the disease, like some other morbid states of the human frame, shall leave a tendency to recurrence. A pin-point hole in a dyke will widen into a gap as big as a church-door in ten minutes, by the pressure of the flood behind it. And so every act which we do in contradiction of our standing as professing Christians, and in the face of the protests, all unavailing, of that conscience which is only a voice, and has no power to enforce its behests, will tend to recurrence once and again. The single acts become habits, with awful rapidity. Just as the separate gas jets from a multitude of minute apertures coalesce into a continuous ring of light, so deeds become habits, and get dominion over us. "He sold himself to do evil." He made himself a bond-slave of iniquity. It is an awful

and a miserable thing to think that professing Christians do often come into that position of being, by their inflamed passions and enfeebled wills, servants of the evil that they do. Alas ! how many of us, if we were honest with ourselves, would have to say, "I am carnal, sold unto sin."

That is not the lowest rung of the slippery ladder. Despotism ends in utter departure.

The word translated here, quite correctly, "transgression," and intensified by that strong adjective attached, "a *great* transgression," literally means *rebellion, revolt*, or some such idea ; and expresses, as the ultimate issue of conscious transgression prolonged and perpetuated into habit, an entire casting off of allegiance to God. "No man can serve two masters." "His servants ye are whom ye obey," whomsoever you may call your master. The Psalmist feels that the end of indulged evil is going over altogether to the other camp. I suppose all of us have known instances of that sort. Men in my position, with a long life of ministry behind them, can naturally remember many such instances. And this is the outline history of the suicide of a Christian. First secret sin, unsuspected, because the conscience is torpid ; then open sin, known to be such, but done nevertheless ; then dominant sin, with an enfeebled will and power of resistance ; then the abandonment of all pretence or profession of religion. The ladder goes down into the pit, but not to the bottom of the pit. And the man that is going down it has a descending impulse after he has reached the bottom step and he falls—Where ? The first step down is tampering with conscience. It is neither safe nor

wise to do anything, howsoever small, against that voice. All the rest will come afterward, unless God restrains—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," and then the bitter harvest of the poisonous grain.

II.—So, secondly, note the help sought.

The Psalmist is like a man standing on the edge of some precipice, and peeping over the brink to the profound beneath, and feeling his head beginning to swim. He clutches at the strong, steady hand of his guide, knowing that, unless he is restrained, over he will go. "Keep Thou back Thy servant from presumptuous sins."

So, then, the first lesson we have to take is, to cherish a lowly consciousness of our own tendency to light-headedness and giddiness. "Blessed is the man that feareth always." That fear has nothing cowardly about it. It will not abate in the least the buoyancy and bravery of our work. It will not tend to make us shirk duty because there is temptation in it, but it will make us go into all circumstances realizing that without that Divine help we cannot stand, and that with it we cannot fall. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." The same Peter that said, "Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I," was wiser and braver when he said, in later days, being taught by former presumption, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Let me remind you, too, that the temper which we ought to cherish is that of a confident belief in the reality of a Divine support. The prayer of my text has no meaning at all, unless the actual supernatural communication by God's own Holy Spirit breathed

into men's hearts be a simple truth. "Hold Thou me up," "Keep Thou me back," means, if it means anything, Give me in my heart a mightier strength than mine own, which shall curb all this evil nature of mine, and bring it into conformity with Thy holy will.

How is that restraining influence to be exercised? There are many ways by which God, in His providence, can fulfil the prayer. But the way above all others is by the actual operation upon heart and will and desires of a Divine Spirit, which uses for its weapon the Word of God, revealed by Jesus Christ, and in the Scriptures. "The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God," and God's answer to the prayer of my text is the gift to every man who seeks it of that indwelling power to sustain and to restrain.

That will keep our passions down. The bubbling water is lowered in its temperature, and ceases to bubble, when cold is added to it. When God's Spirit comes into a man's heart, that will deaden his desires after earth and forbidden ways. It will bring blessed higher objects for all our affections. He who has been fed on "the hidden manna" will not be likely to hanker after the leeks and onions, however strong their smell and pungent their taste, that grew in the Nile mud in Egypt. He who has tasted the higher sweetnesses of God will have his heart's desires after lower delights strangely deadened and cooled. Get near God, and open your hearts for the entrance of that Divine Spirit, and then it will not seem foolish to empty your hands of the trash that they carry in order to grasp the precious things that He gives. A bit of scrap iron magnetized turns to the pole. My

heart, touched by the Spirit of God dwelling in me, will turn to Him, and I shall find little sweetness in the else tempting delicacies that earth can supply. "Keep Thy servant back from," by depriving him of the taste for, "presumptuous sins."

That Spirit will strengthen our wills. For, when God comes into a heart, He restores the due subordination which has been broken into discord and anarchy by sin. He dismounts the servant riding on horseback, and carrying the horse to the devil, according to the proverb, and gives the reins into the right hands. Now, if the gift of God's Spirit, working through the Word of God, and the principles and the motives therein unfolded, and therefrom deducible, be the great means by which we are to be kept from open and conscious transgression, it follows very plainly that our task is twofold. One part of it is to see that we cultivate that spirit of lowly dependence, of self-conscious weakness, of triumphant confidence, which will issue in the perpetual prayer for God's restraint. When we enter upon tasks which may be dangerous, and into regions of temptation which cannot but be so, though they be duty, we should ever have the desire in our hearts and upon our lips that God would keep us from, and in, the evil.

The other part of our duty is to make it a matter of conscience and careful cultivation, to use honestly and faithfully the power which, in response to our desires, has been granted to us. All of you, Christian men and women, have access to an absolute security against every transgression; and the cause lies wholly at your own doors in each case of failure, deficiency, or transgression, for at every moment it was open to

you to clasp the hand that holds you up, and at every moment, if you failed, it was because your careless fingers had relaxed their grasp.

III.—Lastly, observe the daring hope here cherished.

“Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” That is the upshot of the Divine answer to both the petitions, which have been occupying us in these two successive sermons. It is connected with the former of them by the recurrence of the same word, which in the first petition was rendered “cleanse”—or, more accurately, “clear”—and in this final clause is to be rendered accurately, “I shall be *clear* from the great transgression.” And it obviously connects in sense with both these petitions, because, in order to be upright and clear, there must, first of all, be the Divine cleansing, and then Divine restraint.

So, then, nothing short of absolute deliverance from the power of sin in all its forms should content the servant of God. Nothing short of it contents the Master for the servant. Nothing short of it corresponds to the power which Christ puts in operation in every heart that believes in Him. And nothing else should be our aim in our daily conflict with evil and growth in grace. Ah! I fear me that, for an immense number of professing Christians in this generation, the hope of—and, still more, the aim towards—anything approximating to entire deliverance from sin, have faded from their consciences and their lives. Aim at the stars, brother, and, if you do not hit them, your arrow will go higher than if it were shot along the lower levels.

Note that an indefinite approximation to this con-

dition is possible. I am not going to discuss, at this stage of my discourse, controversial questions which may be involved here. It will be time enough to discuss with you whether you can be absolutely free from sin in this world when you are a great deal freer from it than you are at present. At all events, you can get far nearer to the ideal, and the ideal must always be perfect. And I lay it on your hearts, dear friends, that you have in your possession, if you are Christian people, possibilities in the way of conformity to the Master's will, and entire emancipation from all corruption, that you have not yet dreamed of, not to say applied to your lives. "I pray God that He would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming."

That daring hope will be fulfilled one day; for nothing short of it will exhaust the possibilities of Christ's work or satisfy the desires of Christ's heart.

The Gospel knows nothing of irreclaimable outcasts. To it there is but one unpardonable sin, and that is the sin of refusing the cleansing of Christ's blood and the sanctifying of Christ's Spirit. Whoever you are, whatever you are, go to God with this prayer of our text, and realize that it is answered in Jesus Christ, and you will not ask in vain. If you will put yourselves into His hands, and let Him cleanse and restrain, He will give you new powers to detect the serpents in the flowers, and new resolution to shake off the vipers into the fire. For there is nothing that God wants half so much as that we, His wandering children, should come back to Him, and He will cleanse us from the filth of the swine trough and the rags of our exile, and clothe us in fine linen clean and

white. We may each be sinless and guiltless. We can be so in one way only. If we look to Jesus Christ, and live near Him, He "will be made of God unto us wisdom," by which we shall detect our secret sins; "righteousness," whereby we shall be cleansed from guilt; "sanctification," which shall restrain us from open transgression; "and redemption," by which we shall be wholly delivered from evil and presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.



X.

The Great Pleas of a Great Prayer.

“The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”—HEB. xiii. 20.

“HE Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” So says the Psalmist, meaning, I suppose, by the “running” of the “righteous into” the “Name,” the flight of the soul from earthly vanities to the contemplation of the revealed character of God as the foundation of its desires and petitions. “The Name of the Lord” is the basis of prayer. What He is, in so far as is known by what He has said and done, is at once the foundation and the limit of what we can ask of Him. “For Thy Name’s sake,” which is in substance identical with “for Christ’s sake,” is the prevailing plea with God.

So here, the writer, being about to ask no small gift from the Divine hand, even nothing less than the absolute perfecting of these Hebrew Christians for every good work so as to be pleasing in His sight,

heartens himself for the wide and seemingly impossible petition by gazing on God. And these designations of Him, in His nature, His work of raising Jesus Christ from the dead, and His covenant by which He has obliged Himself to a certain course of action, are at once the suppliant's arguments with God to give, and with himself to expect. If we laid more to heart what "the Name of the Lord" holds, we should put all doubt far from us, and be ashamed of our inadequate and limiting expectations, and of the coldness and faithlessness of our petitions.

So in this sermon, paying no attention for the present to the substance of the petitions, which we shall consider in a subsequent discourse, we may look simply at the great revelation made here to us of what God is in Himself and in His acts, as heartening us to expect and to ask great things from Him.

I.—First, then, the Name of God is the warrant for our largest hope.

"The God of peace," says the writer, ". . . make you perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight." He *will* do it, is the implication of the appeal, just because He is "the God of peace."

Now it seems to me that if we rightly grasp the significance and grand sweep of the words before us, we shall never rest content with such superficial exposition of them as supposes that by "the God of peace" is meant nothing more or deeper, nothing grander or higher, than the Author of concord between man and man. The phrase includes that, of course, as it includes other possible applications; but

in its essence it goes a great deal deeper than that and lays hold upon this aspect of the Divine Nature as being the guarantee for every poor humble soul that draws near to Him that it shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and led into a tranquillity which is only possible when all unrighteousness is swept away. God is the God of peace, and, therefore, He will, if we will let Him, make us perfect unto every good work.

That, of course, must imply that the peace which is here ascribed to Him, as its source and fountal possessor, is that deep and changeless calm of an infinite and perfectly harmonious being which is broken by no work, perturbed by no agitations, and yet is no more stagnant than the calm depths of the ocean, being penetrated for ever by warmth and majestic motion in which there is rest.

“The God of peace” wills to give to men something not altogether unlike the tranquillity which He Himself possesses.

The hope seems altogether beyond the conditions of creatural life, which is tossed to and fro amidst changes and agitations. How can the finite, whose very law of life is change, whose nature is open to the disturbances of external solicitations, and the agitations of inward emotions—how can he ever, in this respect, approximate to the repose of God? Yet, analogous, if not similar, tranquillity may fill our hearts. Surely He who dwells in His own undisturbance and desires that His children should be partakers of His stable blessedness, is able, as well as willing, to steady the soul that is knit to Him with somewhat of His own steadiness and calm.

For what is it that breaks human peace? Is it emotion, change, or any of the necessary conditions of our earthly life? By no means. It is possible to carry an unflickering flame through the wildest tempests, if only there be a sheltering hand round it. And it is possible that my agitated and tremulous nature, blown upon by all the winds of heaven, may still burn straight upwards, undeviating from its steady aspiration, if only the hand of the Lord be about me. Precisely because God is the God of peace, it must be His desire to impart His own tranquillity to us.

The sure way by which that deep calm within the breast can be received and retained is by His imparting to us just what the writer here asks for these Hebrews—hearts ready for every good work, and wills submitted to His will. The condition of peace is righteousness, and He who comes to make men partakers of the peace of God is, “first of all, King of Righteousness, and, after that, also King of Peace.” When our wills are made pliable and flexible, no longer stiff and rigid and obstinate to His touch, like a bar of iron, but bendable like a piece of dressed leather; when our hankering desires no longer go after forbidden dainties, but keep themselves within the limits of the Divine will; when we are ready for all that He commands or appoints, meeting the one with un murmuring resignation and the other with unquestioning obedience—then nothing “that is at enmity with joy can utterly abolish or destroy” the peace that we have in God.

We have sought for rest; we have not found it if we have not learned the deep wisdom that lies in, as

well as the soaring hopes that we are encouraged to cherish from, this collocation of my text. "The God of peace make you perfect in every good work, to do His will." Then the peace which comes from unbroken friendship with Him, and that which comes from the inner harmony of a soul united to itself, and that which comes from independence of, and mastery over, circumstances; and that which comes from loving and unselfish relations to our fellows, will all be granted to us, and the great truth will be fulfilled in our hearts, "Great peace have they which love Thy law." It is because God is the God of peace that we may open our mouths wide, knowing that He will fill them, and dare ask that "the very God of peace may sanctify us wholly."

II.—Then note, secondly, how the raising of the Shepherd is the prophecy for the sheep. "The God that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep."

There is a reference here to, and I think a verbal quotation of, the words of the prophet Isaiah. "Where is He that brought them up out of the sea; with the Shepherd of His flock?" The allusive glance at the history of Moses and Israel is instructive and significant. Just as that former leader was brought up from the harmless, curling crests of the Red Sea waves, which drowned the oppressors and introduced the fugitives into the land of liberty, so Christ, at the head of those who love Him and trust Him, has passed through the cloven waters, and has issued forth into the freedom and glory beyond.

While all sweet and blessed familiar applications of the metaphor are also to be kept in view, such as

guidance and tender care and companionship and pasturage, and so on, yet the principal thought implied here is that where the Shepherd goes the sheep follow. Christ's Resurrection and session in glory at the right hand of God point the path and the goal for all His servants.

It is a remarkable fact that, whilst there is no book of the New Testament which speaks so fully and emphatically and often as this one does of the risen glory of Jesus Christ, as King and Priest within the veil, and Forerunner for us, this is the only allusion in it to the Resurrection. And even this allusion does not so much emphasize the fact of resurrection as the state into which the risen Christ has passed for us, as our Forerunner. These two things, the Resurrection and the Ascension, are but two stages in one process, which has for its issue the celestial glory of the enthroned Christ.

I need not dwell upon the fact of the Resurrection as being for us the one manifest and irrefragable proof of a future life. I confess for my own part that if I did not believe that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, I could nowhere find an argument solid enough on which to rest the weight of indubitable certainty of a future life. No doubt there are many confirmatory considerations to be drawn from other sources, both internal and external. We may say that we need to have another life brought into the field of view in order to redress the inequalities, and explain some of the mysteries and problems of the present. We may say that consciousness seems to point in that direction, whatever may be the value of its witness as to the future. But whilst all these

may be subsidiary evidences, there is but one thing that *proves* it. A fact can only be proved by a fact. Jesus Christ died and rose again. Believing that, a man can say, I *know*; doubting or disbelieving it, he can only say, as the mood may take him, I *hope* or I *fear*.

But the main consideration enforced by this designation of God as having brought the Shepherd from the dead is the guarantee thereby given that all the flock will be gathered round Him where He is, and will share in what He is. This same epistle puts a similar thought in its grand commentary on the ideal of manhood in Psalm viii.—“We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus”; and that is enough. I ask myself, is it possible that I shall be delivered from this burden of corruption; that I shall ever, in any state, be able, with unhesitating and total surrender of myself, to make the will of God the very life of my spirit and the bread on which I live? And all the unbelieving, doubtful, and cowardly suggestions of my own heart as to the folly of trying after an unreachable perfection, and the wisdom of acquiescence in the partial condition to which I have already attained, are shivered and swept out of view by this one thing—the sight of a man throned by the side of God, perfect in holiness and serene in untroubled beauty. That is a prophecy for us all. We look out upon the world, or into this cage of evils in our own hearts, and are tempted to fold our hands and acquiesce in the inevitable. Alas! it is too true that “we see not yet all things put under man.” Courage! my brethren. Nothing less than the likeness of Jesus Christ corresponds to God’s will con-

cerning us. In Him there is power to make each of us as pure, as sinless, as the Lord Himself in whom we trust. He rose, and sits crowned with glory and honour. Oh! if Christian men would ponder what of hope and cheer, what of absolute certainty as to their own future, lie in that great fact, they would fight the good fight with far more buoyancy of spirit, and the expectation of conquering would more frequently fulfil itself, and we should know within ourselves "what is the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him on His own right hand in the heavenly places." "The God that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep," has pledged Himself thereby that the sheep, who imperfectly follow Him here when He goeth before them, shall find Him gone before them into the heavens, and there will "follow Him whithersoever He goeth," in the perfect likeness and perfect purity of the perfect kingdom.

III.—Lastly, the everlasting covenant is the teacher and the pledge of our largest desires.

I am not going to enter upon questions difficult in themselves, and which have no special bearing on my present purpose, as to the connection of the last clause of my text with the preceding ones; as to whether we are to suppose that the writer meant that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in or by virtue of the blood of the everlasting Covenant, which would mean that His death, sealing God's covenant with us, was declared to be the sufficient guarantee and seal thereof by the fact of His Resurrection; or whether

we are only to apply the words to the last part of the preceding clause, and to suppose that the meaning is that Christ, by virtue of His death, becomes fully the Shepherd of the sheep. These questions we may leave on one side.

What I now seek to do is to bring clearly before our minds this thought of God as having entered into a covenant with us men, which is sealed for us in the death of Christ; and declared to be valid by His Resurrection.

It is not fashionable in modern theology to talk about God's covenant with us. Our forefathers used to have a great deal to say about it, and it became a technical word with them. And so this generation has very little to say about it, and seldom thinks of the great ideas that are contained in it. But is it not a grand thought, and a profoundly true one, that God, like some great monarch, who deigns to grant a constitution to his people, has condescended to lay down conditions by which He will be bound, and on which we may reckon? Out of the illimitable possibilities of action, limited only by His own nature, and all incapable of being foretold by us, He has marked a track on which He will go. If I may so say, across the great ocean of possible action He has buoyed out His course, and we may prick it down upon our charts, and be quite sure that we shall find Him there.

What is the substance of these obligations which He has bound Himself by solemn utterances of His own faithful lips to fulfil to each of us?

"This is the Covenant," said a prophet, long before the date of this letter, to whom this writer stretches

out a hand across the ages, greeting him as a brother. "This is the Covenant that I will make with the house of Israel—I will put My laws into their minds, and on their hearts will I write them, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people . . . all shall know Me . . . and their sins will I remember no more."

The moulding of heart and will to love His will, so making duty delight, is exactly the substance of this parting prayer, and it is the first article in the everlasting Covenant. With such inward conformity of will comes necessarily blessed mutual possession, God belonging to the obedient will and loving hearts, which belong to and delight in Him. Such a heart will be illuminated with that knowledge which can only be won by possession. But the root of all lies in that final article which is adduced as necessarily presupposed in the others, "*for* . . . their sins will I remember no more." And how do we know that these great promises will be fulfilled? The blood of Jesus is the seal of the Covenant. Jesus has died; therefore sin is forgiven. Jesus Christ has died, therefore our natures will be filled with a Divine Spirit if we will, which shall make His law our delight, and His will ours. Jesus Christ has died, therefore the times of the ignorance are passed; and all men who will look at Him may know the Father. Jesus has died; therefore God is to us our God, and we are to Him His people.

That being the Covenant, how can we expect too confidently, or ask too beseechingly, or wait for the answer too assuredly, or aim too hopefully and buoyantly at the fulfilment thereof? How can we

limit our petitions and desires far within the broad boundaries which God has staked out for us? Be sure of this, that within the four corners of God's articulate and unmistakable assurance lies all that heart can wish or spirit receive from Him. You cannot expect or ask more from Him than He has bound Himself to impart. Your desires can never be so outstretched as to go beyond the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ; and through the ages of time or eternity the everlasting Covenant remains, to which it shall be our wisdom and our blessedness to widen our hopes, expand our desires, conform our wishes, and adapt our work.

It is no vain dream that we may be stainless as the angels of God. The name of God, the glory of the risen Christ, the steadfastness of the everlasting Covenant, all combine to make it as certain as God Himself, that if we will cleave to that Lord, and follow the footsteps of the Shepherd, we shall attain to the place where He is, and partake in the serenity of His rest, and the lustre of His glory.



XI.

The Great Prayer based on Great Pleas.

“Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.”—HEB. xiii. 21



ASSIVE foundations prognosticate a great building. We do not dig deep, and lay large blocks, in order to rear some flimsy structure. We have seen, in the previous sermon, how the words preceding my text bring out certain great aspects of the Divine character and work, and now we have to turn to the great prayer which is based upon these. It is a prophecy as well as a prayer; for such a contemplation of what God is and does makes certain the fulfilment of the desires which the contemplation excites. Small petitions to a great God are insults. He is “the God of peace,” therefore we may ask Him to “make us perfect,” and be sure that He will. He is the God “that brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,” therefore we may ask Him and be sure. He is the God who has sealed an

“everlasting covenant” with us by the blood of the Shepherd, therefore we may ask Him and be sure.

This prayer is the parting highest wish of the writer for his friends. Do *our* desires for ourselves, and for those whom we would seek to bless, run in the same mould? How strange it is that Christian people, who believe in the God whom the previous verse sets before us, so imperfectly and languidly cherish the confidence which inspires desires, for themselves and their brethren, such as those of our this text! Let us look at these great petitions, then, in the light of the great Name on which they are based.

I.—And, first, I ask you to consider the prayer which the Name excites.

“Make you perfect in every good work.” Now, I need only observe here, in regard to the language of the petition, that the word translated “make perfect” is not the ordinary one employed for that idea, but a somewhat remarkable one, with a very rich and pregnant variety of significance. For instance, it is employed to describe the action of the fisherman apostles in *mending* their nets. It is employed to describe the Divine action which “by faith we understand” when He “*made* the worlds.” It is employed to describe the action which the Apostle commends to one of his churches when he bids them “*restore* such an one in the spirit of meekness.” It is the condition which he described when he desired another of his churches to be “perfectly *joined together*, in one mind and in one judgment.” It is still again the expression employed when he speaks of “*filling up*,” or “perfecting that which is lacking in their faith.” The general idea of the word, then, is to make sound, or fit,

or complete, by *restoring*, by *mending*, by *filling up* what is lacking, and by *adapting* all together in harmonious co-operation. And so this is what Christians ought to look for, and to desire as being the will of God concerning them. The writer goes on to still further deepen the idea when He says, "make you perfect in every good work"; where the word *work* is a supplement, and unnecessarily limits the idea of the text. For that applies much rather to character than to work, and the "make you perfect in every good" refers rather to an inward process than to any outward manifestation. And this character, thus harmonized, corrected, restored, filled up where it is lacking, and that in regard of all manner of good—"whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and of good report"—this character is "well-pleasing to God."

So, brethren, you see the width of the hopes—ay! of the confidence—that you and I ought to cherish. We should expect that all the discord of our nature shall be changed into a harmonious co-operation of all its parts towards one great end. We bear about within us a warring anarchy and tumultuous chaos, where solid and fluid, warm and cold, light and dark, calm and storm, contend. Is there any power that can harmonize this divided nature of ours, where lusts and passions, and inclinations of all sorts, drag one away, and duty draws another, so that a man is torn apart as it were by wild horses? There is one. "The worlds" were harmonized, adapted, and framed together, and chaos turned into order and beauty, and the God of Peace will come and do that for us, if we will let Him, so that the long schism which affects our natures, and makes us say sometimes, "I find a law in

my members, warring against the law of my mind," "oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" may be changed into perfect harmony, and the "bear shall eat straw like the ox, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb; and a little child shall lead them"—the meekness of a patient love bridling all their ravening passions. It is possible that our hearts may be united to fear His name; and that one unbroken temper of whole-spirited submission may be ours.

Again, we should expect, and desire, and strive towards the correction of all that is wrong, the mending of the nets, the restoring of the havoc wrought in legitimate occupations and by any other cause. Again, we may strive with hope and confidence towards the supply of all that is lacking. "In every good"—an all-round completeness of excellence ought to be the hope, and the aim, as well as the prayer, of every Christian. Of course our various perfectings will be various. "Star differeth from star in glory," and the new man in many respects follows the lines of the old man and temperament is permanent. But still whilst all that is true, and while each shall ray back the Divine light and radiance at a different angle, and so with a different hue from that which his neighbour, standing beside him, may catch and reflect, on the other hand, the Gospel is given to us to correct temperament, and to make the most uncongenial types of grace and excellence ours. It is meant to make it possible that men should "gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles"; and to correct and fill up what is wrong and what is defective in our natural dispositions, so that the passionate man may be

made meek, and the hesitating man may be made prompt, and the animal man may be sublimed into spirit, and all that is proper to my peculiar constitution and character may be curbed and limited, and much that is not congenial to it may be appropriated and made mine. We are all apt to grow one-sided Christians, and it is our business to try to make ours the things that are lacking in our faith, and to supplement, by the grace of God working in our hearts, the defects of our qualities and the failures of our disposition and temperament. Do not grow like a tree stuck in the middle of a shrubbery, which has only space to put forth branches on one side, and is all lop-sided and awry ; but like some symmetrical growth out in the open, equally spread all round the strong bole, and rising in perfect completeness of harmonious beauty to the topmost twig that looks up to the sky. God means to make us "perfect in every good" ; to harmonize, to correct, to restore, to complete us, that we, having all grace, may abound in all good to His glory.

Such is His purpose. Ah ! brethren ! has not the recognition of that as His purpose alarmingly died out of our minds ? Do we live up to the height of this prayer ? I would that we should all remember more, as defining our aims, and animating our courage, and directing our hopes, that "this is the will of God, even our sanctification" ; and that, when faith is dim, and effort burns low, and we are ready to put all such hopes away as a fair dream, we might be stirred to more lofty expectations, and to open our mouths wider by the thought of the "God of Peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that

great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant"; and ask ourselves what result on us will correspond to that mighty name of the Lord.

II.—And so, secondly, note the Divine work which fulfils the prayer.

"Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." Creation, Providence, and all God's works in the world are also through Jesus Christ. But the work which is spoken of here is yet greater and more wonderful than the general operations of the creating and preserving God, which also are produced and ministered through that eternal Word by whom the heavens were of old, and by whom the heavens are still, sustained and administered. There is, says my text, an actual Divine operation in the inmost spirit of every believing man.

I suppose that everybody must believe that, who believes in a God having any real connection with His creatures. Surely He is not so imprisoned in His own majesty, or shut out from His own creation by His own creation, as that He cannot touch the spirits which He has made. And surely we are not so walled up by our own separate individuality as that we cannot, if we will, open the door for Him to come in and dwell with us, and work on us. Surely if there be any reality in the Gospel teaching at all there is this in it, that Christ in us, or God in Christ working in us by His Divine Spirit, is the crown of that hope and blessing of which Christ for us is the beginning and foundation.

I do not want men to think less of the Cross. God forbid! But I do feel, and feel growingly, that

the Christianity of this generation has not a firm hold on this other aspect of Christ's work. Do not think less of what He has done, but, oh! think more of what He is doing. The perspective of our Christian faith is wrong: not that we draw the Cross too large, but that we paint the dove too small. And I would, for myself and for you, dear brethren, lay this thought upon our hearts, as a far more important one than the ordinary type of Christian thinking makes it out to be—the present dwelling of God in Christ, through the Divine Spirit, in the hearts of all who believe, and His working there that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

If that be a truth, surely these things follow as our plainest Christian duty. Expect that operation: *Do you expect it?* You Christian men and women, do you believe that God will work in your hearts? Some of you do not live as if you did. Desire it. *Do you desire it?* Do you want Him to come and clear out that stable of filth that you carry about with you? Do you wish Him to come and sift and search, and bring the candle of the Lord into the dusty corners? Do you want to get rid of what is not pleasing in His sight? Would you like Him to come and search you, “to try you and see if”—ah, it is not an if!—“there be any wicked way in you, and lead you”—where, alas! our feet are often *not* found—“in the way everlasting”? Expect it, desire it, pray for it. And, when you have got it, see that you profit by it.

God does not work by magic. The Spirit of God which cleanses men's hearts cleanses them on condition, first, of their faith; second, of their submission

and, third, of their use of His gift. If you fling yourselves into the roar of worldly life, the noise of the streets, and the whirring of the looms, and the racket of the children in the nursery, and the buzzings of temptations round about you, and the yelpings for food of your own passions will deafen your ears so as that you will never hear the still, small voice that speaks a present God. If God dwells in us and works in us, let us yield ourselves to His workings and open our hearts to the Guest, and say, "Into every corner, O Lord, I would that Thou wouldst go, to restore and complete."

III.—Lastly, notice the visible manifestation of this inward work.

Now the writer of our text employs the same word in the two clauses, in order to bring out the idea of a correspondence between the human and the Divine Worker. "*To work His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.*"

God works in order that you and I may work. Our action is to follow His. Practical obedience is the issue, and it is the test, of our having this Divine operation in our hearts. There are plenty of people who will talk largely about spiritual gifts, and almost vaunt their possession of such a Divine operation. Let us bring them and ourselves to this test: Are you doing God's will in daily life in the little things? In the monotonous grind of the dusty, level road, with never a turn in it; and the same thing to be done to-morrow that was done to-day, and so on, for indefinite weeks and months, are you, with the spirit that freshens the monotony, doing God's will? If so, then you may believe that God is working in you.

If not, it is no use to talk about spiritual gifts. The test of being filled with the Divine operation is that our actions shall be conformed to His will. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." That is a pin-prick that will empty many a swollen bladder, and bring it down to its real tenuity of substance.

Action is the end of all. We get the truth, we get our souls saved, we have all the abundance and exuberance of Divine revelation, we have the Cross of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of the Divine Spirit—miracles and marvels of all sorts have been done for the one purpose, to make us able to do what is right in God's sight, and to do it because it is His will.

This practical obedience to God's will is the perfection of human conduct. And, on the other hand, a man who does good things without reference to the highest—viz., the will of God—in the doing of them, lacks the fine gold that gilds his deed; and the violet of his virtue is scentless. A good thing may be done without reference to God—good from the point of view of morality, and the self-sacrifice and generosity that are embodied in it. But no good thing reaches its supremest goodness unless it be an act of conscious obedience to God's will.

And this doing of the will of God is perfect blessedness. All things are right for us if we submit to the will of our Father. No storms can blow us out of our course then. "Thou shalt make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee." For all creatures, being God's servants, are in covenant with him who does the will of the Lord.

And how are we to do it, brother? The world says, "Cultivate your own nature; correct your faults; strive to fill up your deficiencies." Christ says, "Cast away yourselves; and trust to Me; and I will give you new life, and a new spirit. Cultivate that!" If we are to do God's will we must have the spirit of Him who said, "I come to do Thy will, O Lord; and Thy law is within My heart." Let us open our hearts to Him; let us seek for Him to enter in. And then, "the God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall make us perfect in every good; to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ."



XII.

An Outline of the Devout Life.

“For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.

“Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.

“Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways.

“When men are cast down thou shalt say: . . . lifting up; and He shall save the humble person.”—JOB xxii. 26—29.



THESE words are a fragment of one of the speeches of Job's friends, in which the speaker has been harping on the old theme that affliction is the consequence and evidence of sin. He has much ado to square his theory with facts, and especially with the fact which brought him to Job's dunghill. But he gets over the difficulty by the simple method of assuming that, since his theory must be true, there must be unknown facts which vindicate it in Job's case; and, since affliction is a sign of sin, Job's afflictions are proof that he has been a sinner. So he charges him with grossest crimes, without a shadow of other reason; and, after having poured this oil of vitriol into his wounds by way of

consolation, he advises him to be good, on the decidedly low and selfish ground that it will pay.

His often-quoted exhortation, "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee," is, in his meaning of it, an undisguised appeal to purely selfish considerations, and its promise is not in accordance with facts. Whether that saying is noble and true or ignoble and false depends on the meanings attached to "peace" and "good." A similar flaw mars the words of our text, as understood by the speaker. But they can be raised to a higher level than that on which he placed them, and regarded as describing the sweet and wonderful prerogatives of the devout life. So understood, they may rebuke and stimulate and encourage us to make our lives conformed to the ideal here.

I.—I note, first, that life may be full of delight and confidence in God.

"Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God." Now when we "delight" in a thing or a person, we recognize that that thing, or person, fits into a cleft in our hearts, and corresponds to some need in our natures. We not only recognize its good, sweetness, and adaptation to ourselves, but we actually possess, in real fruition, the sweetness that we recognize, and the good which we apprehend in it. And so these things, the recognition of the supreme sweetness and all perfect adaptation and sufficiency of God to all that I need; the suppression of tastes and desires which may conflict with that sweetness, and the actual enjoyment and fruition of the sweetness and preciousness which I apprehend—these things are the very heart of a man's

religion. Without delight in God, there is no real religion.

The bulk of men are so sunken and embruted in animal tastes and sensuous desires and fleeting delights that they have no care for the pure and calm joys which come to those who live near God. But above these stand the men, of whom there are a good many amongst us, whose religion is a matter of fear or of duty or of effort. And above them there stand the men who serve because they trust God, but whose religion is seeking rather than finding, and, either from deficient consecration or from false conceptions of Him and of their relation to Him, is overshadowed by an unnatural and unwholesome gloom. And all these kinds of religion, the religion of fear, of duty, of effort, of seeking, and of doubt fighting with faith, are at the best woefully imperfect, and are, some of them, radically erroneous types of the religious life. He is the truly devout man who not only knows God to be great and holy, but feels Him to be sweet and sufficient; who not only fears, but loves; who not only seeks and longs, but possesses; or, in one word, true religion is delighting in God.

So herein is supplied a very sharp test for us. Do our tastes and inclinations set towards Him, and is He better to us than anything beside? Is God to me my dearest faith, the very home of my heart, to which I instinctively turn? Is the brightness of my day the light of His face? Is He the gladness of my joy? Is my Christianity a mill-horse round of service that I am not glad to render? Do I worship because I think it is duty, and are my prayers compulsory and mechanical; or do I worship because my heart goes

out to Him? And is my life calm and sweet because I “delight in the Lord”?

The next words of my text will help us to answer. “Thou shalt lift up thy face unto God.” That is a clear enough metaphor to express frank confidence of approach to Him. The head hangs down in the consciousness of demerit and sin. “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me,” wailed the Psalmist, “so that I am not able to look up.” But it is possible for men to go into God’s presence with a sense of peace, and to hold up their heads before their Judge and look Him in the eyes and not be afraid. And unless we have that confidence in Him, not because of our merits, but because of His certain love, there will be no “delight in the Lord.” And there will be no such confidence in Him unless we have “access with confidence by faith” in that Christ who has taken away our sins, and prepared the way for us into the Father’s presence, and by whose death and sacrifice, and by it alone, we sinful men, with open face and uplifted foreheads, can stand to receive upon our visage the full beams of His light, and expatiate and be glad therein. There is no religion worth naming, of which the inmost characteristic is not delight in God. There is no “delighting in God” possible for sinful men unless they can come to Him with frank confidence, and there is no such confidence possible for us unless we apprehend by faith, and thereby make our own, the great work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

II.—So secondly, note, such a life of delighting in God will be blessed by the frankest intercourse with Him.

“Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.” These

are three stages of this blessed communion that is possible for men. And note, prayer is not regarded in this aspect as duty, nor is it even dwelt upon as privilege, but as being the natural outcome and issue of that delighting in God and confident access to Him which have preceded. That is to say, if a man really has set his heart on God, and knows that in Him is all that he needs, then, of course, he will tell Him everything. As surely as the sunshine draws out the odours from the opening petals of the flowers will the warmth of the felt Divine light and love draw from our hearts the sweet confidence, which it is impossible not to give to Him in whom we delight.

If you have to be driven to prayer by a sense of duty, and if there be no impulse in your heart whispering ever to you, "Tell your Love about it!" you have much need to examine into the reality, and certainly into the depth, of your religion. For as surely as instinctive impulse, which needs no spurring from conscience or will, leads us to breathe our confidences to those that we love best, and makes us restless whilst we have a secret hid from them, so surely will a true love to God make it the most natural thing in the world to put all our circumstances, wants, and feeling into the shape of prayers. They may be in briefest words. They may scarcely be vocalized at all, but there will be, if there be a true love to Him, an instinctive turning to Him in every circumstance; and the single-worded cry, if it be no more, for help is sufficient. The arrow may be shot towards Heaven, though it be but slender and short, and it will reach its goal.

For my text goes on to the second stage, "He shall

hear thee." That was not true as Eliphaz meant it. But it is true if we remember the preceding conditions. The fundamental passage, which I suppose underlies part, at least, of our text, is that great word in the psalm, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Does that mean that if a man loves God he may get everything he wants? Yes! and No! If it is supposed to mean that our religion is a kind of key to God's storehouse, enabling us to go in there and rifle it at our pleasure, then it is not true; if it means that a man who delights himself in God will have his supreme desire set upon God, and so will be sure to get it, then it is true. Fulfil the conditions and you are sure of the promise. If our prayer in its deepest essence be "Not my will, but Thine," it will be answered. When the desires of our heart are for God, and for conformity to His will, as they will be when we "delight ourselves in Him," then we get our heart's desires. There is no promise of our being able to impose our wills upon God, which would be a calamity, and not a blessing, but a promise that they who make Him their joy and their desire will never be defrauded of their desire nor robbed of their joy.

And so the third stage of this frank intercourse comes. "Thou shalt pay thy vows." All life may become a thank-offering to God for the benefits that have flowed unceasing from His hands. First a prayer, then the answer, then the rendered thank-offering. Thus, in swift alternation and reciprocity, is carried on the commerce between Heaven and earth, between man and God. The desires rise to Heaven, but Heaven comes down to earth first; and prayer is not the initial stage, but

the second, in the process. God first gives His promise, and the best prayer is the catching up of God's promise and tossing it back again whence it came. Then comes the second downward motion, which is the answer to prayer, in blessing, and on it follows, finally, the reflection upwards, in thankful surrender and service, of the love that has descended on us, in answer to our desires. So, like sunbeams from a mirror, or heat from polished metal, backwards and forwards, in continual alternation and reciprocation of influence and of love, flash and travel bright gleams between the soul and God. "Truth springs out of the earth, and righteousness looks down from Heaven. Our God shall give that which is good, and the earth shall yield her increase." Is there any other life of which such alternation is the privilege and the joy?

III.—Then, thirdly, such a life will neither know failure nor darkness.

"Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee, and the light shall shine upon thy ways." Then is my will to be omnipotent, and am I to be delivered from the experiences of disappointments and failures and frustrated plans that are common to all humanity, and an essential part of its discipline, because I am a Christian man? Eliphaz may have meant that, but we know something far nobler. Again, I say, remember the conditions precedent. First of all, there must be the delight in God, and the desire towards Him, the submission of the will to Him, and the waiting before Him for guidance. I decree a thing—if I am a true Christian, and in the measure in which I am—only when I am quite sure

that God has decreed it. And it is only His decrees, registered in the chancery of my will, of which I may be certain that they shall be established. There will be no failures to the man whose life's purpose is to serve God, and to grow like Him; but if our purpose is anything less than that, or if we go arbitrarily and self-willedly resolving and saying, "Thus I will; thus I command; let my will stand instead of all reason," we shall have our presumptuous "decrees" disestablished many a time. If we run our heads against stone walls in that fashion, the walls will stand, and our heads will be broken. To serve Him, and to fall into the line of His purpose, and to determine nothing, nor obstinately want anything until we are sure that it is His will—that is the secret of never failing in what we undertake.

We must understand a little more deeply than we are apt to do what is meant by "success," before we predict unfailing success for any man. But if we have obeyed the commandment from the psalm already quoted, which may be again alluded to in the words of my text—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him"—we shall inherit the ancient promise, "and He shall bring it to pass." "All things work together for good to them that love God," and in the measure of our love to Him are our discernment and realization of what is truly good. Religion gives no screen to keep the weather off us, but it gives us an insight into the truth that storms and rain are good for the only crop that is worth growing here. If we understand what we are here for, we shall be very slow to call sorrow evil, and to crown joy with the exclusive title of blessing and

good ; and we shall have a deeper canon of interpretation for the words of my text than he who is represented as speaking them ever dreamed of.

So with the promise of light to shine upon our paths. It is "the light which never was on sea or land," and not the material light which sense-bound eyes can see. That may all go. But if we have God in our hearts, there will be a light upon our way "which knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The Arctic winter, sunless though it be, has a bright heaven radiant with a myriad stars, and flashing with strange lights born of no material or visible orb. And so you and I, if we delight ourselves "in the Lord," will have an unsetting sun to light our paths ; "and at eventide," and in the mirkest midnight, "there will be light" in the darkness.

IV.—Lastly, such a life will be always hopeful, and finally crowned with deliverance.

"When they"—that is, the ways that he has been speaking about—"when they are cast down, thou shalt say, Lifting up." That is an exclamation or a prayer, and we might simply render, "thou shalt say, Up." Even in so blessed a life as has been described, times will come when the path plunges downwards into some valley of the shadow of death. But even then the traveller will bate no jot of hope. He will in his heart say Up even while sense says Down, either as expressing indomitable confidence and good cheer in the face of depressing circumstances, or as pouring out a prayer to Him who "has showed him great and sore troubles" that He would "bring him up again from the depths of the earth." The devout life is largely independent of circumstances, and is

upheld and calmed by a quiet certainty that the general trend of its path is upward, which enables it to trudge hopefully down an occasional dip in the road.

Such an obstinate hopefulness and cheery confidence is the natural result of the experiences already described in the text. If we delight in God, hold communion with Him and have known Him as answering prayer, prospering our purposes, and illuminating our paths, how shall we not hope? Nothing need depress nor perturb those whose joys and treasure are safe above the region of change and loss. If our riches are there where neither moth, rust, nor thieves can reach, our hearts will be there also, and an inward voice will keep singing, Lift up your heart. It is the prerogative of experience to light up the future. It is the privilege of Christian experience to make hope certainty. If we live the life outlined in these verses we shall be able to bring June into December, and feel the future warmth whilst our bones are chilled with the present cold. "When the paths are made low, thou shalt say, Up."

And the end will vindicate such confidence. For the issue of all will be, "He will save the humble person"; namely, the man who is of the character described, and who is "lowly of eyes" in conscious unworthiness, even while he lifts up his face to God in confidence in his Father's love. The "saving" meant here is, of course, temporary and temporal deliverance from passing outward peril. But we may permissibly give it wider and deeper meaning. Continuous partial deliverances lead on to and bring about final full salvation.

We read that in to the words, of course. But nothing less than a complete and conclusive deliverance can be the legitimate end of the experience of the Christian life here. Absurdity can no further go than to suppose that a soul which has delighted itself in God, and looked in His face with frank confidence, and poured out its desires to Him, and been the recipient of numberless answers, and the seat of numberless thank-offerings, has travelled along life's common way in cheerful godliness, has had the light of heaven shining on the path, and has found an immortal hope springing, as the natural result of present experience, shall at the last be frustrated of all, and lie down in unconscious sleep, which is nothingness. If that were the end of a Christian life, then "the pillared firmament were rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble." No, no ! A heaven of endless blessedness and close communion with God is the only possible ending to the facts of the devout life on earth.

We have such a life offered to us all and made possible through faith in Jesus Christ, in whom we may delight ourselves in the Lord, by whom we have "access with confidence," who is Himself the light of our hope, the answer of our prayers, the joy of our hearts, and who will "deliver us from every evil work" as we travel along the road ; "and save us" at last "into His heavenly kingdom," where we shall be joined to the delight of our souls, and drink for evermore of the fountain of life.

XIII.

The Troubled Christ.

“He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.”—JOHN xi. 33.



OUR Lord is on the way to the tomb of Lazarus, and as He looks at the two poor weeping sisters, and the company of more or less sincere mourners weeping with them, a storm of unwonted emotion sweeps across the surface of His generally untroubled spirit. The fact of the emotion is noteworthy, and the nature of it is not less so. A word of explanation as to the terms of our text may put us in the way for gathering the lessons from this unique exhibition of Christ as “troubled.”

Now, you will find in the margin of the Revised Version an alternative rendering of the first clause of my text, which distinctly is to be preferred. Instead of “groaned,” that version reads, “was moved with indignation,” and that is undeniably, I think, the true meaning of the word. Then the second clause of my text would be more accurately, and yet not pedantically rendered, “troubled Himself.” And though, of course, that phrase may be a mere synonym for the

more ordinary passive, "was troubled," still, I think that it is extremely improbable that the evangelist should have employed such a remarkable expression if he had meant nothing more than what is indicated by the more ordinary one. Then, further, we have to observe that we find the further development of this agitation in the tears of Christ.

So, putting all these things together, and making the alterations which I have suggested in the terms of the text, we see here vehement emotion fostered and encouraged by Jesus Christ, and that of such a sort as that in it there is grief mingled with indignation. Now I think that that stands alone in the New Testament as a picture of one phase of Christ's experience, and is profoundly pathetic and as profoundly significant. And I seek to draw two or three plain lessons from it.

I.—First, then, let me ask you to note here the self-troubled Christ.

"My peace give I unto you," He said once, at a time when few men could have spoken of peace. And the words are significant of the ordinary characteristic of His life, round which there lay an untroubled quiet, like a very atmosphere. But tranquillity is not impassiveness, and an unemotional manhood would be a very imperfect manhood. Unspeakably precious to us, therefore, as giving us an assurance of the inmost kindred of Jesus Christ with ourselves in what we sometimes, with a foolish pride, are accustomed to think weakness and to suppress, are all these intimations that He, too, lived a life of feeling, and was affected by present circumstances. That evidence of His true manhood is even more thorough and more

touching than that which is drawn from the consideration that He shared in our corporeal necessities. It is much to know that He hungered, that He thirsted, that He was weary, that He slept the sleep of active and exhausting toil ; but it is more to know that He wondered, and desired with desire, and was grieved and wept, and even was angry ; for thus we learn that “in all points” He experienced our fate, and that “we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.”

But, then, let us remember that all these exhibitions of a true and thorough manhood derive their preciousness, their power, and their pathos from the underlying conviction that this manhood is the temple in which there dwelt Divinity. What would it matter to me that a man, however good, however important in the development of the world’s history, was moved with the common emotions of humanity ? But when I can say to myself that the hungry, thirsty, weary, sleeping Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and when I can further think that He who so entered into the limits of humanity as that He could be surprised, and so shared our tremulous nature as that He could be grieved and glad and indignant, was the Son of God, I know, and, with adoring reverence, say “Lo ! This is our God”—this, and not an impassive monster, far away from our experiences, and, therefore, from our love, but dwelling with us and one of us, that we may be drawn near to Him.

It is important, therefore, to notice that wherever, as in this incident, we have in Scripture some most conspicuous instance of our Lord’s participation in the infirmities and limitations of manhood, there side by

side with it, as certainly as there must be a mountain summit where there is a valley, we have some instance of our Lord's true and proper possession of the power of Divinity. For the weeping Christ, the moved and troubled Man, is He who cast His autocratic voice into the thick darkness of the grave, and made it penetrate through the folds of the napkin that wrapped the face of the dead, and through the veils of that other state, and said, "Lazarus! Come forth." Inextricably interwoven are the weakness of the Man and the omnipotence of the God. And I, for my part, cannot believe that any anonymous scribe could have conceived and stamped on the world's heart the image of the Being who united these two apparently incompatible opposites, unless he had been simply a faithful reporter of what he had beheld. So, then, we have here Jesus Christ manifestly one of ourselves by the very agitation that swept across His Spirit.

But note, further, how we have here Jesus Christ stimulating and encouraging this trouble of His Spirit. "He troubled Himself." Now there is a fostering of emotion, which is unreal, insincere, hypocritical, and harmful. There is nothing more mawkish and disgusting than pumped-up feeling, manufactured to order, because men think they ought to feel. It is separated by a very narrow line from lying.

But, on the other hand, there is a stimulating and encouraging of emotions, if the emotions be themselves right and legitimate, which is wholly right and a plain part of self-government and culture. We usually talk about self-control with the idea that it

means damping down feeling. So it does; but there are feelings which men need to stimulate by setting before themselves resolutely the objects that should evoke them, and by many another way on which I do not need to dwell now. And one lesson that I draw from this strange picture of my text is that the possession of emotions is not weakness, but rather strength; but that weakness is to let them be our masters. Control them, keep them well in hand and under check. Let principle guide feeling, and conscience move principle. Stimulate the sentiments which a true man would have in the presence of grief, and do not be afraid of stirring up yourselves to feelings the possession of which bless you and should impel you to bless the world. We have a Master who, though He dwelt in eternal calm even in His Manhood, would have been untrue to His Manhood and His Godhead alike if, in the presence of sorrow, loss, and death, He had not "troubled Himself."

There are plenty of us priding ourselves on our equable temperament, on our mastery of our emotions, who would be twenty times better men if there were more frequently flashed through them the electric shock of these generous emotions; and if they lived more than they do under their influence.

But then, again, let me remind you that in this picture of a troubled Christ we may see not only the sanction, but also the limits, of legitimate feeling, especially of sorrow. A spurious philosophy tells us that emotional lives are low; a spurious pride is ashamed of the exhibition of feeling; a spurious Christianity preaches to us that sorrow is sin. And, in answer to all that, we point to Jesus Christ at the

grave of Lazarus, shaken by the vehemence of His emotions, and we say, "That is our pattern."

But He teaches us also the limits of sorrow. Look at these two sisters if you want to see excessive emotion. One of them was restless in her grief, unfit to settle down to anything, rushing out to meet the Master with what was almost like a rebuke upon her lips; impatient when He flashed some faint beam of hope into her life, putting away petulantly the thought of "the resurrection on the last day" as much too far off and shadowy to be of any use in present sorrow. And the other of them was sitting with folded hands on her lap, doing nothing but eating her heart out with her sorrows. Let us learn that grief is excessive and sinful when it selfishly absorbs us, makes us oblivious of duty, sets us to aimless regretting that something had not happened which did not happen, and which if it had happened would have made everything else different; and above all when it makes us put away from us, with impatient hand, as too far off, the solace and hopes that lie in the great Beyond. And from these two poor weeping women, to be pardoned and yet to be blamed for the exuberant extravagance of their grief, let us turn to Him who ruled His emotions, and bid back His tears, in order to lift up His voice in confident acknowledgment that the Father heard Him, and then to fling it into the grave, the word of life-giving power. Sorrow that brings us nearer to God in close communion with Him, sorrow that sends us upon our path with the assurance that we are doing the Father's will, sorrow that makes us gentle with all other sad hearts; that is the sorrow which is worthy of the Christ.

II.—And so note, secondly, how we have here the indignant Christ.

“He was moved with indignation in His spirit.”

Why? At what? Not at these poor weeping sisters; not at anybody that stood there. That is plain enough. Then, at what? or why? I suppose because He saw in that one single instance a reproduction in little, and, as it were, an isolated specimen, of all the miseries and evils that were bringing sorrows to so many hearts all over the world, and saw the sorrow in its cause as a fruit of sin.

Perhaps there may be some reference in the indignation to a dark personal source of the sin which begat the sorrow. But whether that be so or no, at all events here we have Jesus Christ looking upon man's miseries, and regarding them with the indignation mingled with grief which is due to the consideration that the miseries are the fruits of evil.

Therefore I say we may learn from this how it becomes us to look upon suffering and sorrow. We must take, in connection with these words, other words in this same Gospel, which at first sight seem to point in another direction. When the disciples, with a foolish curiosity, put the question to our Lord about one poor blind man, “Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” they got the answer, “Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” There our Lord denies that individual transgression is the cause of individual suffering. But here, on the other hand, the indignation implies that the general sorrow is the result of

human sin, and that is a hopeful thought. Sorrow, tears, death, and all the other ills that flesh is heir to are an alien and abnormal excrescence upon creation as God meant it; and He has nothing to do with them but to hate them, and to fight against them, and to cast them out, and to deliver us from them. True, He uses them as His ministers and messengers. True, the chastisement that falls upon His children is the token of His love. But all this is perfectly consistent with the other view, that we are to regard the so-called evil, which is suffering, as being an ugly, unnatural intruder into the creation of God; and that, as Christ, so we should seek to stimulate in ourselves that passionate sentiment of abhorrence of the cause which has brought about such evils.

Let any man, with Christ's eyes in his head, and Christ's Spirit in his spirit, walk the streets of Manchester for one hour, and he will see plenty to arouse his wholesome indignation—an indignation which falls not so much on the victims as on the evil (which is sin) of which they are the victims. But, alas, custom and selfish engrossment with our own affairs make many of us quite insensible of the miseries attendant upon the present social order, and we are too apt to take these things as inseparable adjuncts of our civilization, like bilge-water in a ship or the rattle and dust of a train, very disagreeable, but not to be got rid of.

We may learn, too, what was one very large element in the sorrow of Jesus Christ. He saw causes as we do not. He saw the whole in the single instance; He was keenly sensitive to the contrast between what might have been and what was, as we are not. And

all that keenness of insight, and depth of penetration, were associated in Him with a tenderness and sensitiveness of sympathy, due to His own sinlessness, which made the touch of His hand so soft, but which also made the touch of the world on His hand so intensely painful. He was a Man of Sorrows. The disciples of the weeping Christ need not be ashamed or afraid of tears. The followers of the indignant Christ ought to share His indignation, and we are poor followers if we do not.

III.—Lastly, we may note here the helpful, delivering Christ.

All this storm of agitated feeling which we have been trying, reverently I hope, to contemplate, led on to act. The evangelist marks that in a very significant manner when he says, "He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled. And said, Where have ye laid him?" That was an invitation to them to come and see, but it was also the declaration of His resolve now to act under the impulse of this strong emotion. That resolve, indeed, had been made ere He left the region to which He had retired, and from which He was drawn by the news of the death of Lazarus. But still the excitement of the feelings of which we have been speaking led Him on straight to the grave and set Him to His task.

So we learn the cost at which Jesus Christ does His delivering and redeeming work. It is part of the great mystery of His work for the world that He must necessarily take upon Himself the sin and the guilt from which He delivers us. He does not stand by the river's bank and stretch out a dry hand to the men fighting in the flood, but He Himself

plunges in to rescue them. A faint shadow of the same thing is seen in the law which runs through all humanity, that whoever would help his fellows must himself feel the miseries from which he seeks to deliver. A feeble illustration of it is given to us in the old story of the man who made himself a slave in order to deliver those who were in bondage. And the highest manifestation of it is given in this, that He Himself bare the sickness that He was to bear away; that He endured the griefs which He was to alleviate; that He bowed His head to the death which He was to abolish; that He entered into the grave which He was to burst; and so, having passed through all, He became the Deliverer of all.

Our service for the world can be done on no other terms than His service for us was done. It takes a great deal out of a man truly to help another. We need that our feelings should be stimulated; but all stimulation of feeling which does not end in active work is bad and harmful.

And therefore, dear brethren, though there be much in this strange picture of my text inimitable and unique, the spirit of it must be reproduced in our lives if we are to be the followers of Jesus Christ; and we, too, must know what it is to feel the full rush of the flood that we would stem, and to bear in ourselves the sorrows from which we seek to free others.

Is it not strange that Jesus Christ should have been thus shaken by passionate emotion over sorrows which He knew would all pass like a summer cloud in five minutes? People wonder that He thus was indignant, and troubled Himself and wept when He was just on the point of bringing Lazarus back. Ah!

if Jesus Christ did not feel with us our "light affliction which is but for a moment," what would there be left for Him to feel with us? Blessed be God! however sure He may be that in an instant or two He will bring relief and consolation, like sudden sunshine on a winter's day, He none the less bears the burden of ovr trivial sorrows and takes the load of our fleeting distresses, and weeps with us the tears which next moment He wipes from off all faces. Take Him for your Friend and Comforter; take Him for your Pattern and Example.



XIV.

Christ's Encouragements.

“Son, be of good cheer.”—MATT. ix. 2.



HIS word of encouragement, which exhorts to both cheerfulness and courage, is often upon Christ's lips. It is only once employed in the Gospels by any other than He. If we throw together the various instances in which He thus speaks we may get a somewhat striking view of the hindrances to such a temper of bold, buoyant cheerfulness which the world presents, and of the means for securing it which Christ provides.

But before I consider these individually, let me point you to this thought, that such a disposition, facing the inevitable sorrows, evils, and toilsome tasks of life with glad and courageous buoyancy, is a Christian duty, and is a temper not merely to be longed for, but consciously and definitely to be striven after.

We have a great deal more in our power, in the regulation of moods and tempers and disposition, than we often are willing to acknowledge to ourselves.

Our "low" times—when we fret and are dull, and all things seem wrapped in gloom, and we are ready to sit down and bewail ourselves, like Job on his dung-hill—are often quite as much the results of our own imperfect Christianity as the response of our feelings to external circumstances. It is by no means an unnecessary reminder for us, who have heavy tasks set us, which often seem too heavy, and are surrounded, as we are all, with crowding temptations to be bitter and melancholy and sad, that Christ commands us to be, and therefore we ought to "be of good cheer."

Another observation may be made as preliminary, and that is that Jesus Christ never tells people to cheer up without giving them reason for doing so. We shall see presently that in all cases where the words occur they are immediately followed by words or deeds of His which hold forth something on which, if the hearer's faith lay hold, darkness and gloom will fly like morning mists before the rising sun. The world comes to us and says, in the midst of our sorrows and our difficulties, Be of good cheer, and says it in vain, and generally only rubs salt into the sore by saying it. Jesus Christ never thus vainly preaches the duty of encouraging ourselves without giving us ample reasons for the cheerfulness which He enjoins.

With these two remarks to begin with—that we ought to make it a part of our Christian discipline of ourselves to seek to cultivate a continuous and equable temperament of calm, courageous good cheer, and that Jesus Christ never commands such a temper without showing cause for our obedience—let us turn

for a few moments to the various instances in which this expression falls from His lips.

I.—Now the first of them is this of my text, and from it we learn this truth, that Christ's first contribution to our temper of equable, courageous cheerfulness is the assurance that all our sins are forgiven.

"Son! be of good cheer!" said He to that poor palsied sufferer lying there upon the little light bed in front of Him. He had been brought to Christ to get cured of his palsy. Our Lord seems to offer him a very irrelevant blessing when, instead of the healing of his limbs, He offers Him forgiveness of his sins. That was possibly not what he wanted most, certainly it was not what the friends who had brought him wanted for him, but Jesus knew better than they what the man suffered most from and most needed to have cured. They would have said "Palsy." He said, "Yes! but palsy that comes from sin." For no doubt the sick man's disease was "a sin of flesh avenged in kind," and so Christ went to the fountain-head when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." He therein implied, not only that the man was longing for something more than his four kindly but ignorant bearers there knew, but also that the root of his disease was extirpated when his sins were forgiven.

And so, in like manner, "'tis conscience doth make cowards of us all." There is nothing that so drapes a soul with darkness as either the consciousness of unforgiven sin or the want of consciousness of forgiven sin. There may be plenty of superficial cheerfulness, I know that! And I know what the bitter wise man called it, "the crackling of thorns under the pot." which, the more they crackle, the faster they turn into

powdery ash, and lose all their warmth. For stable, deep, lifelong, reliable courage and cheerfulness, there must be thorough work made with the black spot in the heart, and the black lines in the history. And unless our comforters can come to us and say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," they are only chattering nonsense, and singing songs to a heavy heart which will make an effervescence "like vinegar on nitre," when they say to us, "Be of good cheer." How can I be glad if there lie coiled in my heart that consciousness of alienation and disorder in my relations to God, which all men carry with them, though they overlay it and try to forget it? There is no basis for a peaceful gladness worthy of a man except that which digs deep down into the very secrets of the heart, and lays the first course of the building in the consciousness of pardoned sin. "Son! be of good cheer!" Lift up thy head! Face smaller evils without discomposure, and with quietly throbbing pulses, for the fountain of possible terrors and calamities is stanchd and stayed with, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Side by side with this first instance, illustrating the same general thought, though from a somewhat different point of view, I may put another of the instances in which the same phrase was soothingly on our Lord's lips. "Daughter!" said He to the poor woman with the issue of blood, "Be of good cheer! Thy faith hath saved thee." The consciousness of a living union with God through Christ by faith, which results in the present possession of a real, though it may be a partial, salvation, is indispensable to the temper of equable cheerfulness of which I have been speaking. Apart from that consciousness, you may

get plenty of excitement, but no lasting calm. The contrast between the drugged and effervescent potion which the world gives as a cup of gladness, and the pure tonic which Jesus Christ administers for the same purposes is infinite. He says to us, "I forgive thy sins. By thy faith I save thee! Go in peace." And the burdened heart is freed from its oppression, and the downcast face is lifted up, and all things around change, as when the sunshine comes out on the wintry landscape, and the very snow sparkles into diamonds. So much, then, for the first of the instances of the use of this phrase.

II.—We now take a second. Jesus Christ ministers to us cheerful courage because He manifests Himself to us as a Companion in the storm.

The narrative is very familiar to us, so that I need not enlarge upon it. You remember the scene—our Lord alone on the mountain in prayer, the darkness coming down upon the little boat, the storm rising as the darkness fell, the wind howling down the gorges of the mountains round the landlocked lake, the crew "toiling with rowing, for the wind was contrary." And then, all at once, out of the mysterious obscurity beneath the shadow of the hills, Something is seen moving, and it comes nearer; and the waves become solid beneath that light and noiseless foot, as steadily nearer He comes. Jesus Christ uses the billows as the pavement over which He approaches His servants, and the storms which beat on us are His occasion for drawing very near. Then they think Him a spirit, and cry out with voices that were heard amidst the howling of the tempest, and struck upon the ear of whomsoever told the Evangelist the story. They cry

out with a shriek of terror—because Jesus Christ is coming to them in so strange a fashion! Have *we* never shrieked and groaned, and passionately wept aloud for the same reason; and mistaken the Lord of love and consolation for some grisly spectre? When He comes it is with the old word on His lips, “Be of good cheer!”

“Tell us not to be frightened when we see something stalking across the waves in the darkness!” “It is I.” Surely that is enough. The Companion in the storm is the Calmer of the terror. He who recognizes Jesus Christ as drawing near to his heart over wild billows may well “be of good cheer,” since the storm but brings his truest treasure to him.

“Well roars the storm to those who hear
A deeper Voice across the storm.”

And He who, with unwetted foot, can tread on the wave, and with quiet voice heard above the shriek of the blast, can say, “It is I,” has the right to say, “Be of good cheer,” and never says it in vain to such as take Him into their lives however tempest-tossed, and into their hearts however tremulous.

III.—A third instance of the occurrence of this word of cheer presents Jesus as ministering cheerful courage to us by reason of His being victor in the strife with the world.

“In the world ye shall have tribulation. Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world.”

Of course “the world” which He overcame is the whole aggregate of things and persons considered as separated from God, and as being the great Antagonist and counter-power to a holy life of obedience and

filial devotion. At that last moment when, according to all outward seeming and the estimate of things which sense would make, He was utterly and hopelessly and all but ignominiously beaten, He says, "I have overcome the world." What! Thou! Within four-and-twenty hours of Thy Cross? Is that victory? Yes! For he conquers the world who uses all its opposition as well as its real good to help him, absolutely and utterly, to do the will of God. And he is conquered by the world who lets it, by its glozing sweetnesses and flatteries, or by its knitted brows and frowning eyes and threatening hand, hinder him from the path of perfect consecration and entire conformity to the Father's will.

Christ has conquered! What does that matter to us? Why, it matters this, that we may have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts to make us more than conquerors in the fight. And whosoever will lay his weakness on that strong arm, and open his emptiness to receive the fulness of that victorious Spirit for the very spirit of his life, will be "more than conqueror through Him that loved us," and he can front all the evils, dangers, threatenings, temptations of the world, and its heaped sweets and frowning antagonisms, with the calm confidence that none of them are able to daunt him; and that the Victor Lord will cover his head in the day of battle and deliver him from every evil work. "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world," and play your parts like men in the good fight of faith; for I am at your back, and will help you with Mine own strength.

IV.—The last instance that I point to of the use of this phrase is one in which it was spoken by Christ's

voice from heaven. It was the voice which was heard by the Apostle Paul after he had been almost torn in pieces by the crowd in the Temple, and had been bestowed for security by the half-contemptuous protection of the Roman governor in the castle, and was looking onward into a very doubtful future, not knowing how many hours' purchase his life might be worth. That same night the Lord appeared to him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou testify for Me at Rome." That is to say, No man can touch you until I let him! and Nobody shall touch you until you have done your work and spoken out your testimony. Jerusalem is a little sphere; Rome is a great one. The tools to the hand that can use them! The reward for work is more work, and work in a larger sphere. So cheer up! for I have plenty for you to do yet.

And the spirit of that encouragement may go with us all, breeding in us the quiet confidence that, no matter who may thwart or hinder, no matter what dangers or evils may seem to ring us round, the Master who bids us Be of good cheer! will give us a charmed life, and nothing shall by any means hurt us until He says to us, Be of good courage; for you have done your work; and now come and rest. "Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

XV.

Creed and Conduct.

“These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.”—TITUS iii. 8.



THE very obvious peculiarity of this letter and of the two to Timothy, which are commonly called the pastoral epistles, is the prominence which is given in them to practice. It has been alleged that therein they betray another hand than that of Paul's. But if we consider the circumstances under which they all three were written, especially this one to Titus, the distinction between them and Paul's other letters will appear extremely natural. The little churches in the island of Crete were, I suppose, very much like some of our mission stations, comprising a handful of simple people without much education and with a great many of the chips of the old shell sticking to them still, and of the vices of heathenism lingering amongst them. And so to Titus, who was sent to look after them, and, if necessary, to rebuke them sharply, there is given a

message which lays all stress upon common morality as the most acceptable Christian worship, and the test of all professions of faith. But that morality, which the Apostle so vehemently and constantly insists upon in this letter, is based upon the very same doctrines which fill his other letters. And the close connection between his theology and good works, which is the key-note of this epistle, is all concentrated in the words of our text—"These things I will that thou affirm constantly."

The things that Titus is to "affirm constantly," as we shall see presently, are the doctrines of Christianity. What for? "In order that they which have believed in God" might be orthodox? Guarded against heresies? Certainly! But something more than that. In order that they might "give their minds to being foremost," as the word might be rendered, "in good works." That is what you are to preach your theology for, says Paul; and the only way to make sure that your converts shall live sober and righteous lives is to see that they be thoroughly saturated in the great and recondite truths which I have taught you. So there are two or three thoughts here worth looking at, and the first of them is this.

I.—The Gospel is degraded unless it is asserted strongly.

"These things I will that thou affirm constantly"; or, as the word might be rendered, "asseverate pertinaciously," persistently, positively, affirm and assert constantly and confidently. That is the way in which Paul thinks it ought to be spoken.

"These things." What things? Well, here they are, "After that the kindness and love of God our

Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." There are all the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity packed into three verses. They are all there—man's sin, man's need, the Divinity of Jesus Christ, His sacrificial death, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the act of faith, the inheritance of eternal life. And these are the things which are to be asserted with all the energy and persistency and decisiveness of the speaker's nature. Paul did not believe in fining them down because people did not like them. He did not believe in consulting the "spirit of the age," except thus far, that the more the spirit of the age was contrary to the truth, the more need for the men that believed it to speak out. For there are two ways by which a Christian teacher may shape his teaching in deference to prevailing tendencies: the one is by combating them, and the other is by conforming to them. The shabby way, the short-sighted way, which never comes to any good, is the latter—conforming and toning down, keeping your thumb upon unfashionable aspects of the truth. And the other is the manly way, the honest way, that God blesses—speaking out the word and not pretending to be doubtful about it, because it is unfashionable nowadays to be sure of religious truth, and a reproach to be "dogmatic."

Speak it out, and remember it is as the Apostle says here in the context, "a *faithful* saying"; or, as we

might render it, a faithful message. Then, if it is a message, the messenger's business is to deliver it as received, and its sender's business, not his, is to look after it when delivered. And if it is a "*faithful* message," then it ought to be asserted on lips that are eloquent because they are *believing*; and to come, not as a word of the speaker's own, or the result of his thinking, or with a "peradventure," but as with the force of the "Verily! verily! I say unto you" of the Incarnate and personal Truth Himself.

Oh! if Christian ministers and teachers, and Christian professors, in this day and generation, would drink in more of the spirit of that word of my text, and assert thoroughly, constantly, and confidently the truth, and not go about apologizing for the faith, and seeking to buttress it up with their poor arguments, perhaps there would be a larger and more blessed sense of His presence with His preached Word.

II.—Then, again, there is another thought here worth considering—viz., that this positive assertion of the truths of revelation is the best foundation to lay for practical godliness.

"I will that these things thou affirm constantly, *in order that* they which have believed might be careful to maintain good works." Now, we are often told that our evangelical teaching is far away from daily life, and some people go the length of saying that the central doctrine of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ is an immoral doctrine. I am not going to discuss the latter statement now. If the former one is ever true, it is the fault of the preacher, not of the message. Rightly understood and presented, the great body of truth which we call the Gospel, and

which is summarized in the preceding context, grips daily life very tightly, while, on the other hand, of all the impotent things in this world, none are more impotent than exhortations to be good, which are cut away from the great truths of Christ's mission and work. The world has been listening to these ever since it was a world, and it is not a bit better for them all. There is only one thing that supplies the requisite motive power for practical godliness, and that is the gospel of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His indwelling in our hearts. The motives that the Gospel gives for goodness, for holiness, for purity, for self-sacrifice, for consecration, for enthusiasm, for widespread sympathy and benevolence, for contempt of the material and the perishable—the motives that it gives for all things that are lovely and of good report—are the strongest that can ever be brought to bear upon men, as regards their fulness, their depth, their sweetness, and their transforming energy. I am sure you may go on preaching to men till Doomsday "Be good! be good! be good!" and they will be never a hair the better for all your preaching. If you want to make good men, preach Christ's grace. If you want to have the daily life pure, let it be rooted in the great love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Go to Him for the rules, and to Him for the motives. For there, and there only, men will find that which they need to make the things which they know well enough they ought to do, sweet and possible for them. We shall be good when we have given ourselves up to Christ. And I do not believe that we shall ever be unless we have.

Then, if it be true that the best foundation for all practical goodness is in the proclamation and the

possession of the great message of Christ's love, two things follow. One is that Christian people ought to familiarize themselves with the practical side of their faith, just as Christian ministers ought to be in the habit of insisting, not merely upon the great revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ, but upon that revelation considered as the motive and the pattern for holy living.

And another consequence is that here is a rough but a pretty effective test of so-called religious truth. Does it help to make a man better? It is worth something if it does; if it does not, then it may be ruled out as of small consequence. Short work that makes of a great many of the things which are called religious controversies—squabbles about ecclesiastical matters, and the mere externals and fringes of our faith. The one question, the answer to which may guide a plain man through many perplexities is this—Does that so-called truth help me to be like Jesus Christ? Be sure you get all the practical force that is in it out of what you do believe, and sit very loose in regard to the things about which it will not alter your conduct one iota, which side of the question you may stand upon. The Apostle goes on to say, after my text, “these things”—by which he means that august procession and constellation of Divine truth the heads of which I have read to you—“these things are good and profitable to men.” And the other things that he talks about immediately afterwards are condemned and declared to be “vain,” because they have no practical force in them; and it does not matter a rush to human conduct whether they are true or whether they are not. What a quantity of so-

called religious speculation and talk is condemned by the application of that text !

III.—Then, further, the true test and outcome of professing faith is conduct. In the text the fact that these Cretan Christians “believed in,” or rather, perhaps, we should translate simply, “believed God,” is given as a reason why they ought to maintain good works. That is to say, those who profess to have Him for their Lord and Father, those who avow that they are Christians are by that profession bound to a conduct corresponding to the truth which they say they have received ; and to conformity to the will of the God in whom they say that they have believed. Religious knowledge is all very necessary, but what is it for ? It is to make us like God. Religious emotion is very necessary too, and very delightful. It is right that Christian men should feel the glow of love and gratitude, the joy of forgiveness, the lofty and often unspeakable delights of calm communion with Him. All these are essential parts of a deep and true Christian character, but all these are for a purpose. If we are Christians we *know* God and we *feel* the emotions of the religious life, in order that we may *be*, and that we may *do*. “Conduct,” as one of the apostles of this generation used to be fond of saying, “Conduct is three-fourths of life.” And what we have to do, as Christian men, is to bring the great principles of the Gospel to bear upon our small duties, and day by day to feel that, because we say we have faith in Jesus Christ, therefore we are bound to cultivate all manner of holiness and purity.

Only let us remember that we have to take that phrase “good works,” not in the vulgar, modern sense

by which it is limited to acts of benevolence and Christian charity, but in a very much wider sense. If you will take this little epistle and read it over for this one purpose, to find out what Paul meant by "good works," you will have to widen your notions considerably beyond that superficial definition of them. They do not consist of giving away garments, tracts, money, sympathy, or any of those other forms of charity which have usurped the title; but they are deeds like this. "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise . . . as becometh holiness . . . that the young women be sober, to love their husbands and their children . . . that the young men be sober-minded . . . and that servants be obedient." All these homely things, common secular virtues as people think them, are included in, and are the chief part of, the New Testament notion of good works. Every work is "good" which is done for love of Christ, whether its visible object be the poor, whom "ye have always with you," or our superiors, or our dear ones, or ourselves. "She hath wrought a good work in Me," said Jesus, flinging the shield of His approval over Mary, and therein implying that to be wrought on or with regard to Him makes all work good, and that nothing else does. Such good works require faith in these great and wonderful truths which Paul has been enumerating. Nothing else will make our barren natures bear such fruit, and every man who says that he has faith in these truths is bound to bring forth such, in order to show his faith.

Ah! Christian people, if only we realized as we ought

to do what the obligations of our faith are ; if we only made our own, as we might do, the power to fulfil its obligations thus stored in the truths that we profess to believe, there would be fewer of us professing Christians who would be put to shame by the non-professor that comes to us and says, "Thou hast faith, and I have works ; show me thy faith without thy works"—which is the only way that you seem to be able to show it—"and then I will show thee my faith by my works."

Brother ! "they which believe in God" are largely self-deceived or insincere if they do not set the broad seal of their works to their confession of faith.

IV.—And now, lastly, there is another truth here, and that is, that no one will keep up these good works who does not give his mind to it.

"That they . . . might be careful to maintain." The word that the Apostle employs is a very remarkable one, only used in this one place in the New Testament ; and the force of it might be given by that colloquialism which I have ventured to employ—"Giving their minds to maintaining good works." You have to make a business of it if you would succeed in it. You have to make a definite effort to bring before you the virtues and the excellencies which you ought to possess, and then to try your best to have them. I wonder how many of us have ever honestly sat down and said to ourselves, "Now, there is this, that, and the other type of excellence of character which I know is very unlike my natural disposition, and I must try to acquire it." Have you given—not a lazy thought now and then—but your attention, and the directing of honest efforts to this one point of making a whole circle of goodness in your character complete, round and round ? As it

is, the best of us have little segments, as it were, and then great gaps. Try to make the perfect round, and remember you will not do it unless you try, and try prayerfully and intelligently and constantly, and as a matter of business—of more importance, a great deal, than it is to make money.

And my text suggests one chief means of securing that result, and that is, the habit—which I am afraid is not a habit with a great many professing Christians—the habit of meditation upon the facts of the Gospel revelation looked at in their practical bearing on our daily life and character.

We should bring ourselves into that atmosphere, and saturate our minds and hearts with the thoughts of God's great love to us in Jesus Christ's death for us, of the pattern of His life, of the gift of His Spirit, of the hope of the inheritance of eternal life. We should, by frequent meditation, submit ourselves to the power of these sacred thoughts, and we shall find that in them, one by one, are motives which, twisted together, will make a cord of love that shall draw us up out of the pit of selfishness and the mire of sense, and shall attract us joyfully along the path of obedience, else too hard for our reluctant and unaccustomed feet. "Draw us, and we will run after Thee." Jesus draws us with the cords of love, and the truths which make His Gospel constrain with blessed constraint to the free service of sons, and secure the growth on the barren stock of human nature of else impossible fruit.

XVI.

The Refuge of the Devout Soul.

“Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my Refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.”—PSALM xci. 9, 10.



It requires a good deal of piecing to make out from the Hebrew the translation of our Authorized Version here. The simple, literal rendering of the first words of these verses is, “Surely, Thou, O Lord, art my Refuge”; and I do not suppose that any of the expedients which have been adopted to modify that translation would have been adopted, but that these words seem to cut in two the long series of rich promises and blessings which occupy the rest of the psalm. But it is precisely this interruption of the flow of the promises which puts us on the right track for understanding the words in question, because it leads us to take them as the voice of the devout man, to whom the promises are addressed, responding to them by the expression of his own faith.

The Revised Version is much better here than our Authorized Version, for it has recognized this breach

of the continuity of sequence in the promises, and translated as I have suggested; making the first words of my text, "Thou, O Lord, art my Refuge," the voice of one singer, and "Because thou hast made the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee neither shall any evil come nigh thy dwelling," the voice of another.

Whether or no it be that in the Liturgical service of the Temple this psalm was sung by two choirs which answered one another, does not matter for our purpose. Whether or no we regard the first clause as the voice of the Psalmist speaking to God, and the other as the same man speaking to himself, does not matter. The point is that, first, there is an exclamation of personal faith, and that then that is followed and answered, as it were, by the further promise of continual blessings. One voice says, "Thou, Lord, art my Refuge," and then another voice—not God's, because that speaks in majesty at the end of the psalm—replies to that burst of confidence, "Thou hast made the Lord thy habitation" (as thou hast done by this confession of faith), "there shall no evil come nigh thy dwelling."

I.—We have here the cry of the devout soul.

I observed that it seems to cut in two the stream of promised blessings, and that fact is significant. The psalm begins with the deep truth that "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Then a single voice speaks, "I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." Then that voice, which thus responds to the general statement of the first verse, is answered by a stream of promises. The first part of our text comes in as the

second speech of the same voice, repeating substantially the same thing as it said at first.

Now, notice that this cry of the soul, recognizing God as its Asylum and Home, comes in response to a revelation of God's blessing, and to large words of promise. There is no true refuge nor any peace and rest for a man unless in grasping the articulate word of God, and building his assurance upon that. Anything else is not confidence, but folly, anything else is building upon sand, and not upon the Rock. If I trust my own or my brother's conception of the Divine nature, if I build upon any thoughts of my own, I am building upon what will yield and give. For all peaceful casting of my soul into the arms of God there must be, first, a plain stretching out of the hands of God to catch me when I drop. So the words of my text, "Thou art my Refuge," are the best answer of the devout soul to the plain words of Divine promise. How abundant these are we all know, how full of manifold insight and adaptation to our circumstances and our nature we may all experience, if we care to prove them.

But let us be sure that we *are* hearkening to the voice with which He speaks through our daily circumstances as well as by the unmistakeable revelation of His will and heart in Jesus Christ. And then let us be sure that no word of His, that comes fluttering down from the Heavens, meaning a benediction and enclosing a promise, shall fall at our feet ungathered and unregarded, or shall be trodden into the dust by our careless heels. The manna lies all about us, let us see that we gather it. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face,

Lord, will I seek." When Thou saidst, I will be thy Strength and thy Righteousness, have I said, "Surely, O Jehovah, Thou art my Refuge?" Turn His promises into your creed, and whatever He has declared in the sweet thunder of His voice, loud as the voice of many waters, and melodious as harpers harping with their harps, do you take for your profession of faith in the faithful promises of your God.

Still further, this cry of the devout soul suggests to me that our response ought to be the establishment of a close personal relation between us and God, "Thou, O Lord, art my Refuge." The Psalmist did not content himself with saying, "Lord! Thou hast been *our* dwelling-place in all generations," or as one of the other psalmists has it, "God is *our* Refuge and *our* Strength." That thought was blessed, but it was not enough for the Psalmist's present need, and it is never enough for the deepest necessities of any soul. We must isolate ourselves and stand, God and we, alone together—at heart-grips—we grasping His hand, and He giving Himself to us—if the promises which are sent down into the world for all who will make them theirs can become ours. They are made payable to your order; you must put your name on the back before you get the proceeds. There must be what our good old Puritan forefathers used to call, in somewhat hard language, "the appropriating act of faith," in order that God's richest blessings may be of any use to us. Put out your hand to grasp them, and say, "Mine," not "Ours." The thought of others as sharing in them will come afterwards, for he who has once realized the absolute isolation of the soul and has been alone with God, and in solitude has taken

God's gifts as his very own, is he who will feel fellowship and brotherhood with all who are partakers of like precious faith and blessings. The "ours" will come; but you must begin with the "mine"—"*my* Lord and *my* God." "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*."

Just as when the Israelites gathered on the banks of the Red Sea, and Miriam and the maidens came out with songs and timbrels, though their hearts throbbed with joy, and music rang from their lips for national deliverance, their hymn made the whole deliverance the property of each, and each of the chorus sang, "The Lord is my Strength and my Song, He also is become my Salvation," so we must individualise the common blessing. Every poor soul has a right to the whole of God, and unless a man claims all the Divine nature as his, he has little chance of possessing the promised blessings. The response of the individual to the world-wide promises and revelations of the Father is, "Thou, O Lord, art my Refuge."

Further, note how this cry of the devout soul recognizes God as He to whom we must go because we need a Refuge. The word "refuge" here gives the picture of some stronghold, or fortified place, in which men may find security from all sorts of dangers, invasions by surrounding foes, storm and tempest, rising flood, or anything else that threatens. Only he who knows himself to be in danger bethinks himself of a refuge. It is only when we know our danger and defencelessness that God, as the Refuge of our souls, becomes precious to us. So, underlying, and an essential part of, all our confidence in God, is the

clear recognition of our own necessity. The sense of our own emptiness must precede our grasp of His fulness. The conviction of our own insufficiency and sinfulness must precede our casting ourselves on His mercy and righteousness. In all regions the consciousness of human want must go before the recognition of the Divine supply.

II.—Now, note the still more abundant answer which that cry evokes.

I said that the words, on which I have been commenting thus far, seem to break in two the continuity of the stream of blessings and promises. But there may be observed a certain distinction of tone between those promises which precede and those which follow the cry. Those that follow have a certain elevation and depth, completeness and fulness, beyond those that precede. This enhancing of the promises, following on the faithful grasp of previous promises, suggests the thought that, when God is giving, and His servant thankfully accepts and garners up His gifts, He opens His hand wider and gives more. When He pours His rain upon the unthankful and the evil, and they let the precious, fertilising drops run to waste, there comes after a while a diminution of the blessing; but they who store in patient and thankful hearts the faithful promises of God, have taken a sure way to make His gifts still larger and His promises still sweeter, and their fulfilment more faithful and precious.

But now notice the remarkable language in which this answer is couched. "Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

Did you ever notice that there are two dwelling-places spoken of in this verse? "Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation"; "there shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling." The reference of the latter word to the former one is even more striking if you observe that, literally translated, as in the Revised Version, it means a particular kind of abode—namely, a tent. "Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation." The same word is employed in the 90th Psalm: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." Beside that venerable and ancient abode, that has stood fresh, strong, incorruptible, and unaffected by the lapse of millenniums, there stands the little transitory canvas tent in which our earthly lives are spent. We have two dwelling-places. By the body we are brought into connection with this frail, evanescent, illusory outer world, and we try to make our homes out of shifting cloud-wrack, and dream that we can compel mutability to become immutable, that we may dwell secure. But fate is too strong for us, and although we say that we will make our nest in the rocks, and shall never be moved, the home that is visible and linked with the material passes and melts as a cloud. We need a better dwelling-place than earth and that which holds to earth. We have God Himself for our true Home. Never mind what becomes of the tent, as long as the mansion stands firm. Do not let us be saddened, though we know that it is canvas, and that the walls will soon rot and must some day be folded up and borne away, if we have the Rock of Ages for our dwelling-place.

Let us abide in the Eternal God by the devotion of

our hearts, by the affiancing of our faith, by the submission of our wills, by the aspiration of our yearnings, by the conformity of conduct to His will. Let us abide in the Eternal God, that "when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved," we may enter into two buildings "eternal in the heavens"—the one the spiritual body which knows no corruption, and the other the bosom of the Eternal God Himself. "Because thou hast made Him thy habitation," that dwelling shall suffer no evil to come near it or its tenant.

Still further, notice the scope of this great promise. I suppose there is some reference in the form of it to the old story of Israel's exemption from the Egyptian plagues, and a hint that that might be taken as a parable and prophetic picture of what will be true about every man who puts his trust in God. But the wide scope and the paradoxical completeness of the promise itself, instead of being a difficulty, point the way to its true interpretation. "There shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling"—and yet we are smitten down by all the woes that afflict humanity. "No evil shall befall thee"—and yet "all the ills that flesh is heir to" are dealt out sometimes with a more liberal hand to them who abide in God than to them who dwell only in the tent upon earth. What then? Is God true, or is He not? Did this Psalmist mean to promise the very questionable blessing of escape from all the good of the discipline of sorrow? Is it true, in the unconditional sense in which it is often asserted, that "prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, and adversity of the New"? I think not, and I

am sure that this Psalmist, when he said, "there shall no evil befall thee, nor any plague come nigh thy dwelling," was thinking exactly the same thing which Paul had in his mind when he said, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." If I make God my Refuge, I shall get something a great deal better than escape from outward sorrow—namely, an amulet which will turn the outward sorrow into joy. The bitter water will still be given me to drink, but it will be filtered water, out of which God will strain all the poison, though He leaves plenty of the bitterness in it; for bitterness is a tonic. The evil that is in the evil will be taken out of it, in the measure in which we make God our Refuge, and "all will be right that seems most wrong" when we recognise it to be "His sweet will."

Dear brother, the secret of exemption from every evil lies in no peculiar Providence, ordering in some special manner our outward circumstances, but in the submission of our wills to that which the good hand of the Lord our God sends us for our good; and in cleaving close to Him as our Refuge. Nothing can be "evil" which knits me more closely to God; and whatever tempest drives me to His breast, though all the four winds of the Heavens strove on the surface of the sea, it will be better for me than calm weather that entices me to stray farther away from Him.

We shall know that some day. Let us be sure of it now, and explain by it our earthly experience, even as we shall know it when we get up yonder and "see all the way by which the Lord our God has led us."

XVII.

God's Answer to Man's Trust.

“Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him. I will set him on high, because he hath known My name.”—PSALM xci. 14.



HERE are two voices speaking in the earlier part of this psalm: one that of a saint who professes his reliance upon the Lord, his Fortress; and another which answers the former speaker, and declares that he shall be preserved by God. In this verse, which is the first of the latter portion of the psalm, we have a third voice—the voice of God Himself, which comes in to seal and confirm, to heighten and transcend, all the promises that have been made in His name. The first voice said of himself, “*I* will trust”; the second voice addresses that speaker, and says, “*Thou* shalt not be afraid”; the third voice speaks of him, and not to him, and says, “Because *he* hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him.”

Why does this Divine voice speak thus indirectly of this blessing of His servant? I think partly because it heightens the majesty of the utterance, as

if God spake to the whole universe about what He meant to do for His friend who trusts Him; and partly because, in that general form of speech, there is really couched an "whosoever"; and it applies to us all. If God had said, "Because thou hast set thy love upon Me, I will deliver thee," it had not been so easy for us to put ourselves in the place of the man concerning whom this great Divine voice spoke; but when he says, "Because *he* hath set *his* love upon Me," in the "he" there lies "everybody"; and the promise spoken before the universe as to His servants is spoken universally to His servants.

So, then, these words seem to me to carry two thoughts: the first what God delights to find in a man; and the second what God delights to give to the man in whom He finds it.

I.—Note, first, what God seeks in man. There is, if we may reverently say so, a tone of satisfaction in the words, "Because he hath set his love upon Me," and "because he hath known My name."

Thus, then, there are two things that the great Father's heart seeks, and wheresoever it finds them, in however imperfect a degree, He is glad, and lavishes upon such a one the most precious things in His possession.

What are these two things? Let us look at each of them. Now the word rendered "set his love" includes more than is suggested by that rendering, beautiful as it is. It implies the binding or knitting oneself to anything. Now, though love be the true cement by which men are bound to God, as it is the only real bond which binds men to one another, yet the word itself covers a somewhat wider area than is

covered by the notion of love. It is not my love only that I am to fasten upon God, but my whole self that I am to bind to Him. God delights in us when we cling to Him. There is a threefold kind of clinging, which I would urge upon you and upon myself.

Let us cling to Him in our thoughts, hour by hour, moment by moment, amidst all the distractions of daily life. Whilst there are other things that must legitimately occupy our minds, let us see to it that, ever and anon, we turn ourselves away from these, and betake ourselves, with a conscious gathering in of our minds, to Him, and calm and occupy our hearts and minds with the bright and peaceful thoughts of a present God ever near us, and ever gracious to us. Life is but a dreary stretch of wilderness, unless all through it there be dotted, like a chain of ponds in a desert, these moments in which the mind fixes itself upon God, and loses sorrows and sins and weakness and all other sadnesses in the calm and blessed contemplation of His sweetness and sufficiency. The very heavens are bare and lacking in highest beauty, unless there stretch across them the long lines of rosy-tinted clouds. And so across our skies let us cast a continuous chain of thoughts of God, and, as we go about our daily work, let us try to have our minds ever recurring to Him, like the linked pools that mirror heaven in the midst of the barren desert, and bring a reflection of life into the midst of its death. Cleave and cling to God, brother, by frequent thoughts of Him, diffused throughout the whole continuity of the busy day.

Then again, we might say, let us cleave to Him by our love, which is the one bond of union, as I said,

between man and God, as it is the one bond of union between man and man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength," was from the beginning the Alpha, and until the end will be the Omega, of all true religion; and within the sphere of that commandment lie all duty, all Christianity, all blessedness, and all life. The heart that is divided is wretched; the heart that is consecrated is at rest. The love that is partial is nought; the love that is worth calling so is total and continuous. Let us cling to Him with our thoughts; let us cling to Him with the tendrils of our hearts.

Let us cleave to Him, still further, by the obedient contact of our wills with His, taking no commandments from men, and no overpowering impressions from circumstances, and no orders from our own fancies and inclinations and tastes and lusts, but receiving all our instructions from our Father in Heaven. There is no real contact between us and God, no real cleaving to Him, howsoever the thought of God may be in our minds, and some kind of imperfect love to Him may be supposed to be in our hearts, unless there be the absolute submission of our wills to His authority; and only in the measure in which we are able to say, What He commands I do, and what He sends I accept, and my will is in His hands to be moulded, do we really get close and keep close to our Father in the Heavens. He that hath brought himself into loving touch with God, and clings to Him in that threefold fashion, by thought, love, and submission, he, and only he, is so joined to the Lord as to be one Spirit.

Now that is not a state to be won and kept without much vigorous, conscious effort. The nuts in a machine work loose; the knots in a rope "come untied," as the children say. The hand that clasps anything, by slow and imperceptible degrees loses muscular contraction, and the grip of the fingers becomes slacker. Our minds and affections and wills have that same tendency, to slacken their hold of what they grasp. Unless we tighten up the machine it will work loose; and unless we make conscious efforts to keep ourselves in touch with God, His hand will slip out of ours before we know that it is gone, and we shall fancy that we feel the impression of the fingers long after they have been taken away from our negligent palms.

Besides our own vagrancies, and the waywardness and wanderings of our poor unreliable natures, there come in, of course, as hindrances, all the interruptions and distractions of outside things, which work in the same direction of loosening our hold on God. If the shipwrecked sailor is not to be washed off the raft he must tie himself on to it, and must see that the lashings are reliable and the knots tight; and if we do not mean to be drifted away from God without knowing it, we must make very sure work of anchor and cable, and of our own hold of both. Effort is needed, continuous and conscious, lest at any time we should drift away from Him. And this is what God delights to find: a mind and will that bind themselves to Him.

There is another thing in the text which, as I take it, is a consequence of that close union between man in his whole nature and God. "I will set him on

high because he hath known My name." Notice that the knowledge of the name comes after, and not before, the setting of the love or the fixing of the nature upon God. God's "name" is the same thing as His self-revelation or His manifested character. Then, does not everyone to whom that revelation is made know His name? Certainly not. The word "know" is here used in the same deep sense in which it is employed all but uniformly in the New Testament—the same sense in which it is used in the writings of the Apostle John. It describes a knowledge which is a great deal more than a mere intellectual acquaintance with the facts of Divine revelation. Or, to put the thought into other words, this is a knowledge which comes after we have set our love upon God, a knowledge which is the child of love. We forget sometimes that it is a Person, and not a system of Truth, whom the Bible tells us we are to know. And how do you know people? Only by familiar acquaintance with them. You might read a description of a man, perfectly accurate, sufficiently full, but you would not therefore say you knew him. You might know about him, or fancy you did, but, if you knew him, it would be because you had summered and wintered with him, and lived beside him, and were on terms of familiar acquaintance with him. As long as it is God and not theology, the knowledge of whom makes religion, so long it will not be the head, but the heart or spirit, that is the medium or organ by which we know Him. You have to become acquainted with Him and be very familiar with Him—that is to say, to fix your whole self upon Him—before you "know" Him; and it is only the know-

ledge which is born of love and familiarity that is worth calling knowledge at all. Just as with our earthly relationships and acquaintances, only they who love a man or a woman know such a one right down to the very depth of their being, so the one way to know God's name is to bind myself to Him with mind and heart and will, as friends cleave to one another. Then I shall know Him and be known of Him.

Still further, this knowledge, which God delights to find in us men, is a knowledge which is experience. There is all the difference between reading about a foreign country and going to see it with your own eyes. The man that has been there knows it; the man that has not knows about it. And only he knows God to whom the commonplaces of religion have turned into facts which he verifies by his own experiences.

It is a knowledge, too, which influences life. Obviously the words of my text look back to what the saint was represented as saying in an earlier portion of the psalm. Why does God declare that the man has set his love upon Him, and knows His name? Because the saint professed this, "I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress." These are His name. The man knows it; he has it not only upon his lips, but in his heart, and feels that it is true, and acts accordingly. "He is my Refuge and my Fortress; my God, in Him will I trust." The knowledge which God regards as knowledge of Him is one based upon experience and upon familiar acquaintance, and issuing in joyful recognition of my possession of Him as mine, and the outgoing of my

confidence to Him. These are the things that God desires and delights to find in men.

II.—Note, secondly, what God gives to the man in whom He finds such things.

“I will deliver him”; “I will set him on high.” These two clauses are substantially parallel, and yet there is a difference between them, as is the nature of the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, where the same ideas are repeated with a shade of modification, and the second of them somewhat surpassing the first. “I will deliver him,” says the promise. That confirms the view that the promise in the previous verse, “There shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling,” does not mean exemption from sorrow and trial because, if so, there would be no relevancy or blessedness in the promise of deliverance. He who needs “deliverance” is the man that is surrounded by evils, and God’s promise is not that no evil shall come to the man who trusts Him, but that he shall be delivered out of the evil that does come, and that it will not be truly evil.

And why is he to be delivered? “Because he has bound himself to Me,” says God, “therefore will I deliver him.” Of course, if I am fastened to God, nothing that does not hurt Him can hurt me. If I am knit to Him as closely as this psalm contemplates, it is impossible but that out of His fulness my emptiness shall be filled, and with His rejoicing strength my weakness will be made strong. It is just the same idea as is given to us in the picture of Peter upon the water, when the cold waves are up to his knees, and the coward heart says, “I am ready to sink,” but yet, with the faith that comes with the

fear, he puts out his hand and grasps Christ's hand, and as soon as he does, and the two are united, he is buoyant, and rises again, and the water is beneath the sole of his feet. "He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters." Whoever is joined to God is lifted above all evil, and the evil that continues to eddy about him will change its character, and bear him onwards to his haven. For he who is thus knit to God, in the living, pulsating bond of thought and affection and submission, will be delivered from sin.

When a boy first learns to skate, he needs someone to go behind him and hold him up whilst he uses his unaccustomed limbs; and so, when we are upon the smooth, treacherous ice of this wicked world, if we lean ourselves on God we are kept upright. "He that hath set himself close to Me, I will deliver him," says God. "Yea! he shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

Still further, we have another great promise, which is the explanation and extension of the former, "I will set him on high, because he hath known My name." That is more than lifting a man up above the reach of the storms of life by means of any external deliverance. There is a better thing than that—namely, that our whole inward life be lived loftily. If it is true of us that we know His name, then our lives are hid with Christ in God, and far down below our feet will be all the riot of earth and its noise and tumult and change. We shall live serene and uplifted lives on the mount, if we know His name and have bound ourselves to Him, and the troubles and cares and changes and duties and joys of this Present

will be away down below us, like the lowly cottages in some poor village, seen from the mountain top, the squalor out of sight, the magnitude diminished, the noise and tumult dimmed to a mere murmur that interrupts not the sacred silence of the lofty peak where we dwell with God. "I will set him on high because he knows My name."

Then, perhaps, there is a hint in the words, as there is in subsequent words of the verse, of an elevation even higher than that, when, life ended and earth done, He shall receive into His glory those whom He hath guided by His counsel. "I will set him on high because he hath known My name," says the Jehovah of the Old Covenant. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My Throne," says the Jesus of the New, who is the Jehovah of the Old.



XVIII.

What God will do for us.

“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him : I will be with him in trouble ; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.”—
PSALM xci. 15, 16.



WHEN considering the previous verses of this psalm, I pointed out that at its close we have God's own voice coming in to confirm and expand the promises which, in the earlier portion of it, have been made in His name to the devout heart. The words which we have now to consider cover the whole range of human life and need, and may be regarded as being a picture of the sure and blessed consequences of keeping our hearts fixed upon our Father, God. He Himself speaks, and His word is true.

The verses of the text fall into three portions. There are promises for the suppliant, promises for the troubled, promises for mortals. “He shall call upon Me and I will answer him.” That is for the suppliant. “I will be with him in trouble ; I will deliver him and honour him.” That is for the distressed. “With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My sal-

vation.” That is for the mortal. Now let us look at these three.

I.—The promise to the suppliant.

“He will call upon Me and I will answer.” We may almost regard the first of these two clauses as part of the promise. It is not merely a Hebrew way of putting a supposition, “If he calls upon Me, then I will answer him,” nor merely a virtual commandment, “Call, if you expect an answer,” but itself is a part of the blessing and privilege of the devout and faithful heart. “He shall call upon Me.” The King opens the door of His chamber and beckons us within.

In these great words we may see set forth both the instinct, as I may call it, of prayer, and the privilege of access to God. If a man’s heart is set upon God, his very life-breath will be a cry to His Father. He will experience a need which is not degraded by being likened to an instinct, for it acts as certainly as do the instincts of the lower creatures, which guide them by the straightest possible road to the surest supply of their need. Any man who has learned in any measure to love God and trust Him will, in the measure in which he has so learned, live in the exercise and habit of prayer; and it will be as much his instinct to cry to God in all changing circumstances as it is for the swallows to seek the sunny south when the winter comes, or the cold north when the sunny south becomes torrid and barren. So, then, “he shall call upon Me” is the characteristic of the truly God-knowing and God-loving heart, which was described in the previous verse. “Because he has clung to Me in love, therefore will I deliver him; because he has known My name, therefore will I set

him on high." And because he has clung and known therefore it is certain that He will "call upon Me."

My friend, do you know anything of that instinctive appeal to God? Does it come to your heart and to your lips without your setting yourself to pray, just as the thought of dear ones on earth comes stealing into our minds a hundred times a day, when we do not intend it nor know exactly how it has come? Does God suggest Himself to you in that fashion, and is the instinct of your hearts to call upon Him?

Again, we see here not only the unveiling of the very deepest and most characteristic attribute of the devout soul, but also the assurance of the privilege of access. God lets us speak to Him. And there is, further, a wonderful glimpse into the very essence of true prayer. "He shall call upon Me." What for? No particular object is specified as sought. It is God whom we want, and not merely any things that even He can give. If asking for these only or mainly is our conception of what prayer is, we know little about it. True prayer is the cry of the soul for the living God, in whom is all that it needs, and out of whom is nothing that will do it good. "He shall call upon Me," that is prayer.

"I will answer him." Yes! Of course the instinct is not all on one side. If the devout heart yearns for God, God longs for the devout heart. If I might use such a metaphor, just as the ewe on the one side of the hedge hears and answers the bleating of its lamb on the other, so, if my heart cries out for the living God, anything is more credible than that such a cry should not be answered. You may not get this, that, or the other blessing which you ask, for

perhaps they are not blessings. You may not get what you fancy you need. We are not always good at translating our needs into words, and it is a mercy that there is Someone that understands what we do want a great deal better than we do ourselves. But if below the special petition there lies the cry of a heart that calls for the living God, then whether the specific petition be answered or dispersed into empty air will matter comparatively little. "He shall call upon Me," and that part of his prayer "I will answer" and come to him and be in him. Is that our experience of what it is to pray, and our notion of what it is to be answered?

II.—Further, here we have a promise for suppliants.

I take the next three clauses of the text as being all closely connected. "I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honour him"—in trouble, His presence; from trouble, His deliverance; after trouble, glorifying and refining. There is the whole theory and process of the discipline of the devout man's life.

"I will be with him in trouble." The promise is not only that, when trials of any kind, larger or smaller, more grave or more slight, fall upon us, we shall become more conscious, if we take them rightly, of God's presence, but that all which is meant by God's presence shall really be more fully ours, and that He is, if I may say so, actually nearer us. Though, of course, all words about being near or far have only a very imperfect application to our relation to Him, still the things that are meant by His presence—that is to say, His sympathy, His help, His love—are more fully given to a man who in the darkness is groping for his Father's hand, and yet not so

much groping for as grasping it. He *is* nearer us as well as *felt* to be nearer us, if we take our sorrows rightly. The effect of sorrow devoutly borne, in bringing God closer to us, belongs to it, whether it be great or small; whether it be, according to the metaphor of an earlier portion of this psalm, "a lion or an adder"; or whether it be a buzzing wasp or a mosquito. As long as anything troubles me, I may make it a means of bringing God closer to myself.

Therefore, there is no need for any sorrowful heart ever to say, "I am solitary as well as sad." He will always come and sit down by us, and if it be that, like poor Job upon his dunghill, we are not able to bear the word of consolation, yet He will wait there till we are ready to take it. He is there all the same though silent, and will be near all of us, if only we do not drive Him away. "He will call upon Me and I will answer him"; and the beginning of the answer is the real presence of God with every troubled heart.

Then there follows the next stage, deliverance from trouble. "I will *deliver* him." That is not the same word as is employed in the previous verse, though it is translated in the same way in our Bibles. The word here means lifting up out of a pit, or dragging up out of the midst of anything that surrounds a man, and so setting him in some place of safety. Is this promise always true, about people who in sorrow of any kind cast themselves upon God? Do they always get deliverance from Him? There are some sorrows from the pressure of which we shall never escape. Some of us have to carry such. Has this promise no application to the people for whom outward life can never bring an end of the sorrows and burdens

that they carry? Not so. He will deliver us not only by taking the burden off our backs, but by making us strong to carry it, and the sorrow, which has changed from wild and passionate weeping into calm submission, is sorrow from which we have been delivered. The serpent may still wound our heel, but if God be with us He will give us strength to press the wounded heel on the malignant head, and we can squeeze all the poison out of it. The bitterness remains. Be it so, but let us be quite sure of this, that though sorrow be lifelong, that does not in the least contradict the great and faithful promise, "I will be with him in trouble and deliver him," for where He is *there* is deliverance.

Lastly, there is the third of these promises for the troubled. "I will honour him." The word translated "honour" is more correctly rendered "glorify." Is not that the end of a trouble which has been borne in company with Him; and from which, because it has been so borne, a man may be delivered even whilst it lasts? Does not all such sorrow hallow, ennoble, refine, purify the sufferer, and make him liker his God? "He for our profit, that we should be partakers of His holiness." Is not that God's way of glorifying us before heaven's glory? When a blunt knife is ground upon a wheel, the sparks fly fast from the edge held down upon the swiftly-revolving emery disc, but that is the only way to sharpen the dull blade. Friction, often very severe friction, and heat are indispensable to polish the shaft and turn the steel into a mirror that will flash back the sunshine. So when God holds us to His grindstone, it is to get a polish on the surface. "I will deliver him and I will glorify him."

III. — Last of all, we have the promise for mortals.

“With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” I do not know whether by that first clause the Psalmist meant, as people who sometimes like to make the Psalmist mean as little as possible tell us that he did mean, simply “length of days.” For my own part I do not believe that he did. He meant that, no doubt, for longevity was part of the Old Testament promises for this life. But “length of days” does not “satisfy” all old people who attain to it, and that “satisfaction” necessarily implies something more than the prolongation of the physical life to old age. The idea contained in this promise may be illustrated by the expression which is used in reference to a select few of the Old Testament saints, of whom it is recorded that they died “full of days.” That does not merely mean that they had many days, but that, whatever the number, they had as many as they wished, and departed unreluctantly, having had enough of life. They looked back, and saw that all the past had been very good, and that goodness and mercy had determined and accompanied all their days, and so they did not wish to linger longer here, but closed their eyes in peace, with no hungry, vain cravings for prolonged life. They had got all out of the world which it could give, and were contented to have done with it all.

So this promise assures us that, if we are of those who, in the midst of fleeting days, lay hold on the Ancient of days and live by Him, we shall find a table spread in the wilderness, and, like travellers in an inn, having eaten enough, shall willingly obey the call to

leave the meal provided by the road, and pass into the Father's house, and sit at the bountiful feast there.

The heart that lives near God, whether its years be few or many, will find in life all that life is capable of giving, and when the end comes will not be unwilling that it should come, nor hold on desperately to the last fag-end and fragment of life that it can keep within its clutches, but will be satisfied to have lived and be contented to die.

Nor is this all, for says the Psalmist, "I will show him My salvation." That sight comes after he is satisfied with length of days here. And so I think the fair interpretation of the words, in their place in this psalm, is, that however dimly, yet certainly, here the Psalmist saw something beyond. It was not a black curtain which dropped at death. He believed that, yonder, the man who here had been living near God, calling to Him, realizing His presence, and satisfied with the fatness of his house upon earth, would see something that would satisfy him more. "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." That is satisfaction indeed. And the vision, which is possession, of that perfected salvation is the vision that makes the blessedness of Heaven.

So, dear friends, we, if we like, may have access to God's chamber at every moment, and may have His presence, which will make it impossible that we should ever be alone. We may have Him to deliver us from all the evil that is in evil, and to turn it into good. We may have Him to purge, and cleanse, and uplift, and change us into His likeness, even by the ministry of our trials. We may get out of life the last drop of the sweetness that He has put in it; and, when it

comes to a close, may say, "It is enough! Let Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." And then we may go to see it better in that world where we shall all, if we attain thither, be "satisfied" when we "awake in His likeness."



XIX.

Our Captain.

“Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince.”—
ACTS v. 31.



THE word rendered “Prince” is rather an infrequent designation of our Lord in Scripture. It is only employed in all four times—twice in Peter’s earlier sermons recorded in this Book of the Acts; and twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In a former discourse of the Apostle’s he had spoken of the crime of the Jews in killing “the Prince of Life.” Here he uses the word without any appended epithet. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read once of the “Captain of Salvation,” and once of the “Author of Faith.”

Now these three renderings “Prince,” “Captain,” “Author,” seem singularly unlike. But the explanation of their being all substantially equivalent to the original word is not difficult to find. It seems to mean properly a Beginner, or Originator, who takes the lead in anything, and hence the notions of chief-ainship and priority are easily deduced from it.

Then, very naturally, it comes to mean something very much like cause; with only this difference, that it implies that the person who is the Originator is Himself the Possessor of that of which He is the Cause to others. So the two ideas of a Leader, and of a Possessor who imparts, are both included in the word.

My intention in this sermon is to deal with the various forms of this expression, in order to try and bring out the fulness of the notion which Scripture attaches to the leadership of Jesus Christ. He is first of all, generally, as our text sets Him forth, the Leader, absolutely. Then there are the specific aspects, expressed by the other three passages, in which He is set forth as the Leader through death to life; the Leader through suffering to salvation; and the Leader in the path of faith. Let us look, then, at these points in succession.

I.—First, we have the general notion of Christ the Leader.

Now I suppose we are all familiar with the fact that the names "Joshua" and "Jesus" are, in the original, one. It is further to be noticed that, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was familiar to Peter's hearers, the word of our text is that employed to describe the office of the military leaders of Israel. It is still further to be observed that, in all the instances in the New Testament, it is employed in immediate connection with the name of Jesus. Now, putting all these things together, remembering to whom Peter was speaking, remembering the familiarity which many of his audience must have had with the Old Testament in its Greek

translation, remembering the identity of the two names Joshua and Jesus, it is difficult to avoid the supposition that the expression of our text is coloured by a reference to the bold soldier who successfully led his brethren into the Promised Land. Joshua was the Captain of the Lord's host, to lead them to Canaan; the second Joshua is the Captain of the Host of the Lord to lead to a better rest. Of all the Old Testament heroes perhaps there is none, at first sight, less like the second Joshua than the first was. He is only a rough, plain, prompt, and bold soldier. No prophet was he, no word of wisdom ever fell from his lips, no trace of tenderness was in anything that he did, meekness was alien from his character, he was no sage, he was no saint, but decisive, swift, merciless, when necessary, full of resource, sharp, and hard as his own sword. And yet the parallel may be drawn.

The second Joshua is the Captain of the Lord's host, as was typified to the first one, in that strange scene outside the walls of Jericho, where the earthly commander, sunk in thought, was brooding upon the hard nut he had to crack, when suddenly he lifted up his eyes, and beheld a man with a drawn sword. With the instinctive alertness of his profession and character, his immediate question was, "Art thou for us or for our enemies?" And he got the answer "No! I am not on thy side, nor on the other side, but thou art on Mine. As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up." And so Jesus Christ, the "Strong Son of God," is set forth by this military emblem as being Himself the first Soldier in the army of God, and the Leader of all the host.

We forget far too much the militant character of

Jesus Christ. We think of His meekness, His gentleness, His patience, His tenderness, His humility, and we cannot think of these too much, too lovingly, too wonderingly, too adoringly, but we forget far too often the strength which underlay the gentleness, and that His life, all gracious as it was, when looked at from the outside, had beneath it a continual conflict, and was in effect the warfare of God against all the evils and the sorrows of humanity. We forget the courage that went to make the gentleness of Jesus, the daring that underlay His lowliness; and it does us good to remember that all the so-called heroic virtues were set forth in supreme form, not in some vulgar type of excellence, such as a conqueror, whom the world recognizes, but in that meek King whose weapon was love, yet was wielded with a soldier's hand.

This general thought of Jesus Christ as the first Soldier and Captain of the Lord's army not only opens for us the side of His character which we too often pass by, but it also says something to us as to what our duties ought to be. He stands to us in the relation of General and Commander-in-Chief; then we stand to Him in the relation of private soldiers, whose first duty is unhesitating obedience, and who in doing their Master's will must put forth a bravery far higher than the vulgar courage that is crowned with wreathed laurels on the bloody battlefield, even the bravery that is caught from Him who set His face as a flint to do His work.

Joshua's career had in it a great stumbling-block to many people, in that merciless destruction of the Canaanite sinners, which can only be vindicated by remembering, first, that it was a Divine appointment,

and that God has the right to punish; and, second, that those old days were under a different law, or at least a less manifestly developed law of loving-kindness and mercy than, thank God! we live in. But whilst we look with wonder on these awful scenes of destruction, may there not lie in them the lesson for us that antagonism and righteous wrath against evil in all its forms is the duty of the soldiers of Christ? There are plenty of causes to-day which to further and fight for is the bounden duty of every Christian, and to further and fight for which will tax all the courage that any of us can muster. Remember that the leadership of Christ is no mere pretty metaphor, but a solemn fact, which brings with it the soldier's responsibilities. When our Centurion says to us, "Come!" we must come. When He says to us, "Go!" we must go. When He says to us "Do this!" we must do it, though heart and flesh should shrink and fail. Unhesitating obedience to His authoritative command will deliver us from many of the miseries of self-will; and brave effort at Christ's side is as much the privilege as the duty of His servants and soldiers.

II.—So note, secondly, the Leader through death to life.

Peter, in the sermon which is found in the third chapter of this Book of the Acts, has his mind and heart filled with the astounding fact of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and in the same breath as he gives forth the paradoxical indictment of the Jewish sin, "You have killed the Prince of Life"—the Leader of Life—he also says: "And God hath raised Him from the dead." So that the

connection seems to point to the risen and glorified life into which Christ Himself passed, and by passing became capable of imparting it to others. The same idea is here as in Paul's other metaphor: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept—the first sheaf of the harvest, which was carried into the Temple and consecrated to God, and was the pledge and prophecy of the reaping in due season of all the miles of golden grain that waved in the autumn sunshine. So, says Peter, He is the Leader of Life, who Himself has passed through the darkness, for "you killed Him"; mystery of mysteries as it is that you should have been able to do it, deeper mystery still that you should have been willing to do it, deepest mystery of all that you did it not when you did it, but that "He was dead and is alive for evermore." "You killed the Prince of Life and God raised Him from the dead."

He has gone before us. He is the first that should rise from the dead. For, although the partial power of His communicated life did breathe for a moment resuscitation into two dead men and one dead maiden, these shared in no resurrection-life, but only came back again into mortality, and were quickened for a moment but to die at last the common death of all. But Jesus Christ is the first that has gone into the darkness and come back again. Across the untrodden wild there is one track marked, and the footprints upon it point both ways—to the darkness and from the darkness. So the dreary waste is not pathless any more. The broad road that all the generations have trodden in their way into the everlasting darkness is left now, and "the travellers pass by

the byway" which Jesus Christ has made by the touch of His risen feet.

Thus, not only does this thought teach us the priority of that resurrection-life, but it also declares to us that Jesus Christ, possessing the risen life, possesses it to impart it. For, as I remarked in my introductory observations, the conception of this word includes not only the idea of a Leader, but that of One who, Himself possessing or experiencing something, gives it to others. All men rise again. Yes! "But every man in his own order." There are two principles at work in the resurrection of all men. They are raised on different grounds, and they are raised for different uses. They that are Christ's are brought again from the dead, because the life of Christ was in them; and it is as impossible that they, as that He, should be holden of it. Union with Jesus Christ by simple faith is the means, and the only means revealed to us, whereby men shall be raised from the dead at the last into the resurrection which is anything else than a prolonged death. As for others, "some shall rise unto shame and everlasting contempt," rising dead, and dead after they are risen—dead as long as they live. There be two resurrections, whether simultaneous in time or no is of no matter, and all of us must have our part in the one or in the other; and faith in Jesus Christ is the only means by which we can take a place in the great army and procession that He leads down into the valley and up to the sunny heights.

If He be the Leader through death unto life, then it is certain that all who follow in His train shall attain to His side and shall share in His glory. The

General wears no order which the humblest private in the ranks may not receive likewise, and whomsoever He leads, His leading will not end till He has led us close to His side, if we trust Him. So, calmly, confidently, we may each of us look forward to that dark journey waiting for us all. All our friends will leave us at the tunnel's mouth, but He will go with us through the gloom, and bring us out into the sunny lands on the southern side of the great white mountains. The Leader of our souls will be our Guide, not only unto death, but far beyond it, into His own life.

III.—So, thirdly, note the Leader through suffering to salvation. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is written, “It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain”—or the Leader—“of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” That expression might seem at first to shut Jesus Christ out from any participation in the thing which He gives. For salvation is His gift, but not that which He Himself possesses and enjoys; but it is to be noticed that in the context of the words which I have quoted, “glory” is put as substantially synonymous with salvation, and that the whole is suffused with the idea of a long procession, as shown by the phrase, “bringing many sons.” Of this procession Jesus Christ Himself is the Leader.

So, clearly, the notion in the context now under consideration is that the life of Jesus Christ is the type to which all His servants are to be conformed. He is the Representative Man, who Himself passes through the conditions through which we are to pass,

and Himself reaches the glory which, given to us, becomes salvation.

“Christ is perfected through sufferings.” So must we be. Perfected through suffering? you say. Then did His humanity need perfecting? Yes, and No. There needed nothing to be hewn away from that white marble. There was nothing to be purged by fire out of that pure life. But I suppose that Jesus Christ’s human nature needed to be unfolded by life, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “He learned obedience, though He were a son, through the things which He suffered.” And fitness for His office of leading us to glory required to be reached through the sufferings which were the condition of our forgiveness and of our acceptance with God. So, whether we regard the word as expressing the agony of suffering in unfolding His humanity, or in fitting Him for His redeeming work, it remains true that He was perfected by His sufferings.

So must we be. Our characters will never reach the refinement, the delicacy, the unworldliness, the dependence upon God, which they require for their completion, unless we have been passed through many a sorrow. There are plants which require a touch of frost to perfect them, and we all need the discipline of a Father’s hand. These sorrows that come to us all are far more easily borne when we think that Christ bore them all before us. It is but a blunted sword which sorrow wields against any of us. It was blunted on His armour. It is but a spent ball that strikes us; its force was exhausted upon Him. Sorrow, if we keep close to Him, may become solemn joy, and knit us more thoroughly to Himself. Ah!

brother! we can better spare our joys than we can spare our sorrows. Only let us cleave to Him when they fall upon us.

Christ's sufferings led Him to His glory, so will ours if we keep by His side;—and only if we do. There is nothing in the mere fact of being tortured and annoyed here on earth, which has in itself any direct and necessary tendency to prepare us for the enjoyment, or to secure to us the possession, of future blessedness. You often hear superficial people saying, "Oh! He has been very much troubled here, but there will be amends for it hereafter." Yes! God would wish to make amends for it hereafter, but He cannot unless we comply with the conditions. And it needs that we should keep close to Jesus Christ in sorrow, in order that it should work for us "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The glory will come if the patient endurance has preceded, and has been patience drawn from Jesus.

I wondered at the beauteous hours,
The slow result of winter showers,
You scarce could see the grass for flowers.

The sorrows that have wreathed round any head like a crown of thorns will be covered with the diadem of Heaven, if they are sorrows borne with Christ.

IV.—Lastly, we have Jesus, the Leader in the path of faith. "The Author of Faith," the verse in the Epistle to the Hebrews says. "Author" does not cover all the ground, though it does part of it. We must include the other idea which I have been trying to set forth. He is "Possessor" first and "Giver" afterwards. For Jesus Christ Himself is both the

Pattern and the Inspirer of our faith. Your time will not allow me to dwell upon this as I had desired ; but let me just briefly hint some thoughts connected with it.

Jesus Christ Himself walked by continual faith. His manhood depended upon God, just as ours has to depend upon Jesus. He lived in the continued reception of continual strength from above by reason of His faith, just as our faith is the condition of our reception of His strength. We are sometimes afraid to recognize the fact that the Man Jesus, who is our pattern in all things, is our pattern in this, the most special and peculiarly human aspect of the religious life. But if Christ was not the first of believers, His pattern is woefully defective in its adaptation to our need. Rather let us rejoice in the thought that all that great muster-roll of the heroes of the faith, which the Epistle to the Hebrews has been dealing with, have for their Leader—though, chronologically, He marches in the centre—Jesus Christ, of whose humanity this is the document and proof that He says, in the Prophet's words :—"I will put my trust in Him."

Remember, too, that the same Jesus who is the Pattern is the Object and the Inspirer of our faith ; and that if we fulfil the conditions in the text now under consideration, "looking off" from all others, stimulating and beautiful as their example may be, sweet and tender as their love may be, and "looking unto Jesus," He will be in us, and above us, in us to inspire, and above us to receive and to reward our humble confidence.

So, dear friends, it all comes to this, "Follow thou

Me." In that commandment all duty is summed, and in obeying it all blessedness and peace are ensured. If we will take Christ for our Captain, He will teach our fingers to fight. If we obey Him we shall not want guidance, and be saved from the perplexities born of self-will. If we keep close to Him and turn our eyes to Him, away from all the false and fleeting joys and things of earth, we shall not walk in darkness, howsoever earthly lights may be quenched, but the gloomiest path will be illuminated by His presence, and the roughest made smooth by His bleeding feet that passed along it. If we follow Him, He will lead us down into the dark valley, and up into the blessed sunshine, where participation in His own eternal life and glory will be salvation. If we march in His ranks on earth, then shall we

With joy upon our heads arise,
And meet our Captain in the skies.



Vessels of Gold and of Earth.

“In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth ; and some to honour and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.”—2 TIM. ii. 20, 21.



HIS is a condensed parable, or expanded metaphor, designed to illustrate the wide difference in Christian character amongst nominal Christians, and to enforce the obligations upon each to belong to the nobler class whom Jesus Christ can use for His service.

The Apostle has been speaking about certain apostates who had fallen away, and in their fall had dragged down others. Contemplating their collapse, like that of houses built upon sand, he comforts himself with the thought that “the firm foundation of God” (by which he means the aggregate of true Christians) stands. And then in my text, retaining, but slightly modifying, the metaphor of a building, he applies it, not so much to the invisible nucleus of real Christians, as to the visible Church as an organization, in which he finds wide varieties of worth and useful-

ness. The "great house," then, is the external institution of the Church; the "vessels" are its members. Some of them are precious, and used for high purposes, some of them cheap and common. A man can settle to which of the classes he belongs. If he belong to the one, honour, if he belong to the other, dishonour is his portion.

Now, then, let us look at this parable for a little while.

I.—First of all, then, note the two classes.

There is gold and silver plate set out upon the high table, where the lord of the house sits; or ranged in glittering rows upon some buffet or side-board. There are pots and pans in the scullery, fit only for base uses. And, says Paul, there is as much difference between different sets of people who are joined in the same Christian community as between these two sets of vessels.

Now, of course, we are not to suppose that the distinction which he here draws is the vulgar, worldly one according to natural gifts and capacities. Men put shining faculties and talents in high places, and lowly or moderate ones in the background. That is not the way in which God classifies vessels in His house. The humblest service may be great and wonderful; the poorest and narrowest gifts may be lofty and precious. The difference between the golden vessel and the wooden tub or the earthen pot of our parable does not lie in natural endowment, capacity, circumstances, resources, or the like. One man may be brilliant and another stupid. It makes no difference in the possibilities of his preciousness in the eyes of the lord of the house.

But the difference points to a thing within our own power—viz., the difference in maturity of Christian character, in fervour, and earnestness of Christian devotion. It is this, and only this, and not the vulgar distinctions of temperament or capacity, which lie so little within our own power, that determines the hierarchy of excellence and the aristocracy of nobility in the Church of Christ. The graces of a Christian character are the “gold and silver.” The “earth” is the tendencies and desires or the selfishness of our own nature. These are the things which, respectively predominating in our lives, determine to which of these two classes we shall belong.

Look at the churches; look at this congregation, or any other agglomeration of people who are brought together for religious purposes. Is not the description of them that there is a little nucleus of unmistakeably devout people, and there is the great, nebulous tail, loosely compacted, of people concerning whom it takes a great deal of charity to suppose that they are Christians at all, and of whom not even charity can deny that they are anything but very imperfect ones? Every great cause, after its inspired infancy, gets weighted and dragged down by the adhesion of people of that sort; and in all our Christian communities, wherever there is the organized body, there is naturally the accretion to it of a mass of people who either are altogether unaffected by the great central truths and mighty motives of the Gospel, or whose Christian character has been arrested at an early stage, and who spend all their lives immature and infantile. Is not that the condition of all our communities? “In a great

house are vessels of gold and silver," but also "vessels of wood and clay." The mass of ice brings down the temperature of the whole. It is so much dead weight that has to be carried by the engine, and it clogs the operations, and lowers the aspirations, and drags down the average of the Christian character of all our so-called religious communities. The sadness is not so much that there are men in some kind of nominal connection with God's Church who are utterly unaffected by God's truth, since they may be touched and brought near; but the tragic and mysterious thing is that some of you have as much as you have and no more; that, feeling some faint influence on your spirits of the great "powers of the world to come," that influence is so obscured and neutralized by self and sin and earth, as that it comes to be practically reduced to a vanishing quantity. The sadness is that some of you, having tasted the sweetness, have so little cared for larger draughts of the honey; that some of you with the river of the water of life by your sides, and having tasted a drop of it, long not for larger gifts. It is not for me to decide whether a man has any hold upon Jesus Christ or no, but it is for me to warn you all, and to take the warning to myself, that the mere outward connection with a Christian community determines nothing as to the worth of the man in the eyes of God. "In a great house there are vessels of gold . . . and vessels of clay."

II.—Now note, again, the possibility and the method of passing from the lower class to the higher.

"If a man purify himself from these." The *these* there evidently means, not vices which the Apostle

has been specifying, but the whole class of the commoner and viler vessels of which he has been speaking. The word employed by him is very eloquent of the way by which one can pass from the one class to the other. If we were to translate it literally it would be, "If a man purify himself out from these," which is a pregnant way of saying, If a man by purifying himself, signs himself out, as it were, of the lower class. Notice, then, that the first and deepest impression that ought to be made upon us by the contemplation of this mingled condition of things, inseparable from the external institution of a Christian community, is of the need for a careful look to ourselves. The Apostle does not say, "Strike these men out of Christian fellowship, and so get rid of them"; but, knowing that, after all efforts to keep a church pure, there will be the mingling, he says, "Look to yourselves, and see that *you* do not belong to that category; and get out of it by the simple way of making yourselves pure."

Now, then, notice the great truth that the cleanness of a man's heart and life determines his place in the Christian Church. It is only purity that can make a vessel into gold. The possibility of passing from the one category shows that, as I have already said, the difference intended does not rest upon any natural ground, but it is entirely a matter of volition and effort. A wooden vessel, scoured, continues wooden; a golden cup, tarnished, continues gold. But a Christian who has purged himself from evil has, as it were, changed the very material of which he is made; and, instead of being the rude earthenware of his natural self, has come to be at least plated over with,

if not, as by some diviner alchemy, converted into, the precious metal of a life instinct with God. We can cleanse ourselves up to be gold; we can foul ourselves down to be clay.

Then note, further, how here we have the distinct declaration that it is a man's own business to make himself clean. Some of us would have been afraid to declare that side of the truth so broadly and unconditionally as the Apostle here does; but the New Testament method is always broad and generous, and trusts to the common-sense interpretation of the readers, and so puts one side of a complicated truth with almost exclusive energy at one moment, and the complementary side with equal earnestness at another. And that is not one-sidedness or exaggeration, but it is simply dwelling on the relevant thing at the right moment. So here Paul, who strongly taught that no man can cleanse himself except the grace of God dwell in his heart, and union to Jesus Christ through faith make him lord and wielder of Divinely given powers for purifying, here speaks as if all lay in our own choice, and was to be determined by our own honest effort. It is an altogether different thing to say to a man, "Now you make yourself clean," and to say to him, "Purify yourself by honest use of the Divine power for purifying which you get by simple trust in Jesus Christ." The one exhortation is to make bricks without straw, hopeless and impracticable; the other is to make and mould the given material into fitting forms.

You can make yourselves almost anything you like. The possibilities of elevating Christian character to maturity and perfect likeness to Jesus Christ are

indefinite. No man can ever say here on earth, "I have made myself so pure that there is no room for growth." You can purge yourself thoroughly from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, "perfecting holiness," if you will do it "in the fear of the Lord."

Brother! I lay at your doors the responsibility for your Christian character, and for the class of the vessels in the great house to which you belong.

III.—Then, again, note the characteristics of the more precious. These are three, which the Apostle touches upon, and on which I follow him in briefly commenting. The "vessel unto honour" is "sanctified," "meet for the Master's use," "ready for every good work."

Now with regard to the first of these. The word translated "sanctified" here seems in this connection more properly to mean rather "consecrated." These two expressions, "sanctified" and "consecrated," are, in their root meaning, one, but in their use and application they somewhat diverge—the former of them, "sanctified," implying rather moral purifying, the latter of them rather devotion to a cause, a person, or a purpose. And here the meaning of "consecrated," or set apart for use, is obviously the one intended—the figure of the vessel still being in the Apostle's mind, and his thought being that these more precious vessels specially belong to and are set apart for the Master of the house. Consecration, then, is indispensable if we are to be of any use to Jesus or precious in His sight. We have to yield ourselves, to say, I am thine, O Lord, in will, in affection, in purpose, in honest use of capacities and opportunities, and resources, and all things. To give

ourselves to God is the secret of all growth and of all service. Such consecration is the issue of a thankful recognition of what He has done for me. The icy barriers of self-regard are thawed away, and the whole nature turned into flowing, sweet water by the warmth of the great Sun of Righteousness. The incense that is kindled is fragrant, and goes up to Heaven in spires of wreathed smoke. The heart that is inflamed by the recognition and reception of the warmth of the Divine love is the heart that, consecrated, exhales in devotion and aspires to God. And such consecration can be carried out, in reference to all the minute and common things of life. Zechariah, in his great prophecy of the coming days, beheld all the pots and vessels of Jerusalem as "holy to the Lord," like the sacrificial vessels of the Temple. And so upon every common deed and every secular avocation, and upon ourselves as engaged in and pursuing these, there may still be written "Holiness to the Lord." The material for consecration is common life.

Then, again, another characteristic set forth here is "meet for the Master's use," or, as it might perhaps be rendered even more accurately, simply, "useful to the Master." What kind of vessel can Christ make use of? The sort that so many of you are of? Can any good be done with you? Are some of you professing Christians fit to be used for anything in Christ's service except the poorest outward business of the house of God, doing some kind of purely secular work which happens to be tacked on to spiritual work? That is the best that many of you are fit for. Why? Because you are neither

pure nor consecrated. You cannot make man-of-war's masts out of crooked sticks. And no man is meet for the Master's use except on condition of devotion and purity.

Is it not a wonderful thing to think that any of us can be of use to Jesus Christ? He wants men, because without them He cannot carry out His great purposes. "Go ye into the village over against you, and at the place where two ways meet ye shall find an ass tied. . . . Say, the Lord hath need of him." The Lord of Heaven required that poor animal that He might sit upon it, and enter Jerusalem in triumph. He stoops to need us, and in His condescension He will use us.

There can be no honour greater than that of being meet for the Master's use; and, if I might so say, of being the cup which is lifted to the Master's Almighty and tender lips, when He says, Give Me to drink.

The last characteristic is that of readiness for all sorts of service. The figure of the cup is abandoned here. There should be many-sided alacrity. We shall be alert, and on the outlook for opportunities to do Christ's will, in proportion as we purify ourselves. As the eyes of a handmaiden turn to her mistress, so should ours be ever looking for the guidance of our Master's eye. The calls to "good works" often come suddenly, and if we are not living with our loins girt, the opportunity may pass before we have pulled ourselves together.

That preparedness will be many-sided if we have purified ourselves. We are all in danger of limitation in our conceptions of Christian duty, and of repeating one note instead of the full chord. The

true servant is a servant of all work. The most precious vessel is to be used for many purposes.

IV.—Lastly, note the honour to the vessel.

I suppose that when the Apostle speaks of “vessels of honour” he is not thinking of anything beyond the fact that they are vessels for use. The true honour is service. Reputation and other consequences of service are desirable, but nothing is greater, more ennobling and blessed, than the service itself. “I am among you as he that serveth.” That is the great example of the dignity of service. But, apart from that consideration, can any of us have higher honour than to be of use to Jesus Christ? The King’s servants are made nobles by their service, as was the case of old in England.

But we need not exclude all reference to the future. The vessels of gold and silver are not only honoured by use, but shall be honoured because they have been used. Their value may not have been suspected by some who profited by their service. Many a vessel of pure virgin gold has been found in the huts of ignorant savages, employed for the basest ends, and its value all unknown. And so many a humble Christian man and woman, whom the world, in its purblindness, classes amongst the lower orders, and passes by as unintelligent, and uninfluential, and unimportant, and undeserving of its regard or praise, shall be found, in the day of reversal of the hasty judgments and worldly estimates, to be of pure gold, fit for the high table and the Master’s lips. And many a vessel that was thought to be very precious will be found to be very worthless in that day when “the fire shall declare it.”

Brother ! Remember, use is honour ; service is exaltation. Service comes from purifying, and purifying comes from our own efforts—efforts built upon faith and upon the honest use of the God-given powers for cleansing our evil.

If we seek to purge ourselves, and in any humble measure become here “meet for the Master’s use,” we may hope that, like the Temple vessels from Babylon, we shall, in due time, be carried across the desert and into the city ; and there, cleansed and burnished, shall be employed for higher service and nobler functions in the courts of the Lord’s house, the great mansion in the heavens.



XXI.

Jehovah-jireh.

“And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh ; that is, the Lord will provide.”—GEN. xxii. 14.



AS these two, Abraham and Isaac, were travelling up the hill, the son bearing the wood and the father with the sad burden of the fire and the knife. The boy said: “Where is the lamb?” and Abraham, thrusting down his emotion and steadying his voice, said: “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.” When the wonderful issue of the trial was plain before him, and as he looked back upon it, the one thought that rose in his mind was of how, beyond his meaning, his words had been true. So he named that place by a name that spoke nothing of his trial, but everything of God’s provision—“The Lord will see,” or “The Lord will provide.”

I.—The words have become proverbial and threadbare as a commonplace of Christian feeling. But it may be worth our while to ask for a moment what it was exactly that Abraham expected the Lord to provide. We generally use the expression in reference to outward things, and see in it the assurance that we shall not

be left without the supply of the necessities for which, because God has made us to feel them, He has bound Himself to make provision. And most blessedly true is that application of them, and many a Christian heart in days of famine has been satisfied with the promise, when the bread that was given has been scant.

But there is a meaning deeper than that in the words. It is true, thank God! that we may cast all our anxiety about all outward things upon Him, in the assurance that He who feeds the ravens will feed us, and that if lilies can blossom into beauty without care, we shall be held by our Father of more value than these. But there is a deeper meaning in the provision spoken of here. What was it that God provided for Abraham? What is it that God provides for us? A way to discharge the arduous duties which, when they are commanded, seem all but impossible for us, and which, the nearer we come to them, look the more dreadful and seem the more impossible. And yet, when the heart has yielded itself in obedience, and we are ready to do the thing that is enjoined, there opens up before us a possibility provided by God, and strength comes to us equal to our day, and some unexpected gift is put into our hand, which enables us to do the thing of which Nature said: "My heart will break before I can do it"; and in regard to which even Grace doubted whether it was possible for us to carry it through. If our hearts are set in obedience to the command, the further we go on the path of obedience, the easier the command will appear, and to try to do it is to ensure that God will help us to do it.

This is the main provision that God makes, and it is

the highest provision that He can make. For there is nothing in this life that we need so much as to do the will of our Father in Heaven. All outward wants are poor compared with that. The one thing worth living for, the one thing which being secured we are blessed, and being missed we are miserable, is compliance in heart with the commandment of our Father; and that compliance wrought out in life. So, of all gifts that He bestows upon us, and of all the abundant provision out of His rich storehouses, is not this the best, that we are made ready for the required service? When we get to the place we shall find some lamb "caught in the thicket by its horns"; and Heaven itself will supply what is needful for our burnt offering.

And then there is another thought here which, though we cannot certainly say it was in the speaker's mind, is distinctly in the historian's intention, "The Lord will provide." Provide what? The lamb for the burnt offering which He has commanded. It seems probable that that bare mountain-top which Abraham saw from afar, and named Jehovah-jireh, was the mountain-top on which afterwards the Temple was built. And perhaps the wood was piled for the altar, on which Abraham was called to lay his only son, on that very piece of primitive rock which still stands visible, though Temple and altar have long since gone; and which for many a day was the place of the altar on which the sacrifices of Israel were offered. It is no mere forcing of Christian meanings on to old stories, but the discerning of that prophetic and spiritual element which God has impressed upon these histories of the past, especially in all their climaxes and crises, when we see in the

fact that God provided the ram which became the appointed sacrifice, through which Isaac's life was preserved, a dim adumbration of the great truth that the only Sacrifice which God accepts for the world's sin is the Sacrifice which He Himself has provided.

This is the deepest meaning of all the sacrificial worship, as of Israel so of heathen nations—God Himself will provide a Lamb. The world has built altars, and Israel, by Divine appointment, had its altar too. All these express the want which none of them can satisfy. They show that man needed a Sacrifice; and that Sacrifice God has provided. He asked from Abraham less than He gives to us. Abraham's devotion was sealed and certified because he did not withhold his son, his only son, from God. And God's love is sealed because He hath not withheld His only begotten Son from us.

So this name that came from Abraham's grateful and wondering lips contains a truth which holds true in all regions of our wants. On the lowest level, the outward supply of outward needs; on a higher, the means of discharging hard duties and a path through sharp trials; and, on the highest of all, the spotless sacrifice which alone avails for the world's sins—these are the things which God provides.

II.—So, note again on what conditions He provides them.

The incident and the name became the occasion of a proverb, as the historian tells us, which survived down to the period of his writing, and probably long after, when men were accustomed to say, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." The

provision of all sorts that we need has certain conditions as to the when and the where of the persons to whom it shall be granted. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." If we want to get our outward needs supplied, our outward weaknesses strengthened, power and energy sufficient for duty, wisdom for perplexity, a share in the sacrifice which taketh away the sins of the world, we get them all on the condition that we are found in the place where all the provision is treasured. If a man chooses to sit outside the provision shop, he may starve on its threshold. If a man will not go into the bank, his pockets will be empty, though there may be bursting coffers there to which he has a right. And if we will not ascend to the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place by simple faith, and by true communion of heart and life, God's amplest provision is naught to us; and we are empty in the midst of affluence. Get near to God if you would partake of what He has prepared. Live in fellowship with Him by simple love, and often meditate on Him, if you would drink in of His fulness. And be sure of this, that howsoever within His house the stores are heaped and the treasury full, you will have neither part nor lot in the matter, unless you are children of the house. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." And round it there is a waste wilderness of famine and of death.

Further, note *when* the provision is realized.

When the man is standing with the knife in his hand, and next minute it will be red with the son's blood—then the call comes: "Abraham!" and then he sees the ram caught in the thicket. There had been a long weary journey from their home away

down in the dry, sunny south, a long tramp over the rough hills, a toilsome climb, with a breaking heart in the father's bosom, and a dim foreboding gradually stealing on the child's spirit. But there was no sign of respite or of deliverance. Slowly he piles together the wood, and yet no sign. Slowly he binds his boy, and lays him on it, and still no sign. Slowly, reluctantly, and yet resolvedly, he unsheathes the knife, and yet no sign. Then he lifts his hand, and then it comes.

That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven, before the hand is put out to help us. Such is the law, not only because the next moment is always necessarily dark, nor because God will deal with us in any arbitrary fashion, and play with our fears, but because it is best for us that we should be forced to desperation, and out of desperation should pluck the flower safety. It is best for us that we should be brought to say, "My foot slippeth!" and then, just as our toes are going upon the glacier, the help comes and "Thy mercy held me up." "The Lord is her helper, and that right early." When He delays, it is not to trifle with us, but to do us good by the sense of need, as well as by the experience of deliverance. At the last moment, never before it, never until we have found out how much we need it, and never too late, comes the Helper.

So "It is provided" for the people that quietly and persistently tread the path of duty, and go wherever His hand leads them, without asking anything about where it does lead. The condition of the provision is our obedience of heart and will. To Abraham doing what he was commanded, though his heart was

breaking as he did it, the help was granted—as it always will be.

III.—And so, lastly, note what we are to do with the provision when we get it.

Abraham christened the anonymous mountain-top, not by a name that reminded him or others of his trial, but by a name that proclaimed God's deliverance. He did not say anything about his agony or about his obedience. God spoke about that, not Abraham. He did not want these to be remembered, but what he desired to hand on to later generations was what God had done for him. Oh! dear friends, is that the way in which we look back upon life? Many a bare, bald mountain-top in your career and mine we have got our names for. Are they names that commemorate our sufferings or God's blessings? When we look back on the past what do we see? Times of trial or times of deliverance? Which side of the wave do we choose to look at, the one that is smitten by the sunshine or the one that is all black and purple in the shadow? The sea on the one side will be all a sunny path, and on the other dark as chaos. Let us name the heights that lie behind us, visible to memory, by names that commemorate, not the troubles that we had on them, but the deliverances that on them we received from God.

This name enshrines the duty of commemoration—ay! and the duty of expectation. "The Lord will provide." How do you know that, Abraham? and his answer is, "Because the Lord did provide." That is a shaky kind of argument if we use it about one another. Our resources may give out, our patience may weary. If it is a storehouse that we have to go to, all the corn that is treasured in it will be eaten up

some day; but if it is to some boundless plain that grows it that we go, then we can be sure that there will be a harvest next year as there has been a harvest last. And so we have to think of God, not as a storehouse, but as the soil from which there comes forth year by year and generation after generation the same crop of rich blessings for the needs and the hungers of every soul. If we have to draw from reservoirs we cannot say, "I have gone with my pitcher to the well six times, and I shall get it filled at the seventh." It is more probable that we shall have to say, "I have gone so often that I durst not go any more"; but if we have to go, not to a well, but to a fountain, then the oftener we go, the surer we become that its crystal cool waters will always be ready for us. "Thou hast been with me in six troubles; and in seven thou wilt not forsake me," is a bad conclusion to draw about one another; but it is the right conclusion to draw about God.

And so, as we look back upon our past lives, and see many a peak gleaming in the magic light of memory, let us name them all by names that will throw a radiance of hope on the unknown and unclimbed difficulties before us, and say, as the patriarch did when he went down from the mount of his trial and deliverance, "The Lord will provide."



XXII.

Jehovah Nissi.

“ And Moses built the altar, and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi ” (that is, the Lord is my Banner).—EXODUS xvii. 15.



WE are all familiar with that picturesque incident of the conflict between Israel and Amalek, which preceded the victory and the erection of this memorial trophy. Moses, as you remember, went up on the mount whilst Joshua and the men of war fought in the plain. But I question whether we usually attach the right meaning to the symbolism of this event. We ordinarily, I suppose, think of Moses as interceding on the mountain with God. But there is no word about prayer in the story, and the attitude of Moses is contrary to the idea that his occupation was intercession. He sat there, with the rod of God in his hand, and the rod of God was the symbol and the vehicle of Divine power. When he lifted the rod Amalek fled before Israel; when the rod dropped Israel fled before Amalek. That is to say, the uplifted hand was not the hand of intercession, but the hand which communicated power and victory. And so, when the conflict is over, Moses

builds the memorial of thanksgiving to God, and piles together these great stones—which perhaps, still, stand in some of the unexplored valleys of that weird desert land—to teach Israel the laws of conflict and the conditions of victory. These laws and conditions are implied in the name which he gave to the altar that he built—Jehovah Nissi, “the Lord is my Banner.”

Now, then, what do these stones, with their significant name, teach us, as they taught the ancient Israelites? Let me throw these lessons into three brief exhortations.

I.—First, realize for whose cause you fight. The banner was the symbol of the cause for which the army fought, or the cognizance of the king or commander whom it followed. So Moses, by that name given to the altar, would impress upon the minds of the cowardly mob that he had brought out of Egypt—and who now had looked into an enemy’s eyes for the first time—the elevating and bracing thought that they were God’s soldiers, and that the warfare which they waged was not for themselves, nor for the conquest of the country for their own sake, nor for mere outward liberty, but that they were fighting that the will of God might prevail, and that He might be the King now of one land—a mere corner of the earth—and thereby might come to be King of all the earth. That rude altar said to Israel: “Remember, when you go into the battle, that the battle is the Lord’s; and that the standard under which you war is the God for whose cause you contend—none else and none less than Jehovah Himself. You are consecrated soldiers, set apart to fight for God.”

Such is the destination of all Christians. They

have a battle to fight of which they do not think loftily enough unless they clearly and constantly recognize that they are fighting on God's side.

I need not dwell upon the particulars of this conflict, or run into details of the way in which it is to be waged. Only let us remember that the first field upon which we have to fight for God we carry about within ourselves; and that there will be no victories for us upon any other until we have, first of all, subdued the foes that are within. And then let us remember that the absorbing importance of inward conflict absolves no Christian man from the duty of strenuously contending for all things that are "lovely and of good report," and from waging war against every form of sorrow and sin which his influence can touch. There is no surer way of securing victory in the warfare within and conquering self than to throw myself into the service of others, and lose myself in their sorrows and needs. There is no possibility of my taking my share in the merciful warfare against sin and sorrow, the tyrants that oppress my fellows, unless I conquer myself. These two fields of the Christian warfare are not two in the sense of being separable from one another, but they are two in the sense of being the inside and the outside of the same fabric. The warfare is one, though the fields be two.

Let us remember, too, on the other hand, that whilst it is our simple bounden duty, as Christian men and women, to reckon ourselves as anointed, and called for the purpose of warring against sin and sorrow, wherever we can assail them, there is nothing more dangerous, and few things more common, than the hasty identification of fighting for some whim, or

prejudice, or narrow view, or partial conception of our own, with contending for the establishment of the will of God. How many wicked things have been done in this world for God's glory! How many obstinate men, who were really only forcing their own opinions down people's throats because they were theirs, have fancied themselves to be pure-minded warriors for God! How easy it has been, in all generations, to make the sign of the Cross over what had none of the spirit of the Cross in it; and to say, "The cause is God's, and therefore I war for it"; when the reality was, "The cause is mine, and therefore I take it for granted that it is God's."

Let us beware of the wolf in sheep's clothing, the pretence of sanctity which is only selfishness with a mask on. And, above all, let us beware of the uncharitableness and narrowness of view, the vehemence of temper, the fighting for our own hands, the enforcing of our own notions and whims and peculiarities, which has often done duty for being true Christian service for the Master's sake. We are God's host, but we are not to suppose that every notion that we take into our heads, and for which we may contend, is part of the cause of God.

And then remember what sort of men the soldiers in such an army ought to be. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." These bearers may either be regarded as a solemn procession of priests carrying the sacrificial vessels; or, as is more probable from the context of the original, as the armour-bearers of the great King. They must be pure who bear His weapons, for these are His righteous love, His loving purity. If our camp is the camp of the Lord, no violence should be

there. What sanctity, what purity, what patience, what long-suffering, what self-denial, and what enthusiastic confidence of victory there should be in those who can say, "We are the Lord's host. Jehovah is our Banner!" He always wins who sides with God. And he only worthily takes his place in the ranks of the sacramental host of the Most High who goes into the warfare knowing that, because He is God's soldier, he will come out of it, bringing his victorious shield with him, and ready for the laurels to be twined round his undinted helmet. That is the first of the thoughts, then, that are here.

II.—The second of the exhortations which come from the altar and its name is, Remember whose commands you follow.

The banner in ancient warfare, even more than in modern, moved in front of the host, and determined the movements of the army. And so, by the stones that he piled and the name which he gave them, Moses taught Israel and us that they and we are under the command of God, and it is the movements of His staff that are to be followed. Absolute obedience is the first duty of the Christian soldier, and absolute obedience means the entire suppression of my own will, the holding of it in equilibrium until He puts His finger on the side that He desires to dip and lets the other rise. They only understand their place as Christ's servants and soldiers who have learned to hush their own will until they know their Captain's. In order to be blessed, to be strong, to be victorious, the indispensable condition is that our inmost desire shall be, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Sometimes, and often, there will be perplexities in

our daily lives, and conflicts very hard to unravel. We shall often be brought to a point where we cannot see which way the Banner is leading us. What then? "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait" for the salvation and for the guidance of his God. And we shall generally find that it is when we are looking too far ahead that we do not get guidance. You will not get guidance to-day for this day next week. When this day next week comes, it will bring its own enlightenment with it.

Lead, kindly Light, ...
 One step enough for me.

Let us take short views both of duty and of hope, and we shall not so often have to complain that we are left without knowing what the Commander's orders are. Sometimes we are so left, and that is a lesson in patience, and is generally God's way of telling us that it is not His will that we should do anything at all just yet. Sometimes we are so left in order that we may put our hand out through the darkness, and hold on by Him, and say, "I know not what to do, but mine eyes are towards Thee."

And be sure of this, brethren, that He will not desert His own promise, and that they who in their inmost hearts can say "The Lord is my Banner" will never have to complain that He led them into a pathless wilderness where there was no way. It is sometimes a very narrow track, it is often a very rough one, it is sometimes a dreadfully solitary one; but He always goes before us, and they who hold His hand will not hold it in vain. "The Lord is my Banner"; obey His

orders and do not take anybody else's; nor, above all the suggestions of that impatient, talkative heart of yours, instead of His commandments.

III.—Lastly, the third lesson that these grey stones preach to us is, Recognize by whose power you conquer.

The banner, I suppose, to us English people suggests a false idea. It suggests the notion of a flag, or some bit of flexible drapery which fluttered and flapped in the wind, but the banner of old world armies was a rigid pole, with some solid ornament of bright metal on the top, so as to catch the light. The banner-staff spoken of in the text links itself with the preceding incident. I said that Moses stood on the mountain-top with the rod in his hand. Now that rod was exactly a miniature banner, and when he lifted it, victory came to Israel; and when it fell, victory deserted their arms. So by the altar's name he would say, Do not suppose that it was Moses that won the battle, nor that it was the rod that Moses carried in his hand that brought you strength. The true Victor was Jehovah, and it was He who was Moses' Banner. It was by Him that the lifted rod brought victory; as for Moses, he had nothing to do with it; and the people had to look higher than the hill-top where he sat.

This lesson puts stress on the first word of the phrase, instead of on the last, as in my previous remarks. "*The Lord is my Banner*,"—no Moses, no outward symbol, no man or thing, but only He Himself. Therefore, in all our duties, and in all our difficulties, and in all our conflicts, and for all our conquests, we are to look away from creatures, self

externals, and to look only to God. We are all too apt to trust in rods instead of in Him, in Moses instead of in Moses' Lord.

We are all too apt to trust in externals, in organizations, sacraments, services, committees, outside aids of all sorts, as our means for doing God's work, and bringing power to us and blessing to the world. Let us get away from them all, dig deeper down than any of these, be sure that these are but surface reservoirs, but that the fountain which fills them with any refreshing liquid which they may bear lies in God Himself. Why should we trouble ourselves about reservoirs when we can go to the Fountain? Why should we put such reliance on churches and services and preaching and sermons and schemes and institutions and organizations when we have the Divine Lord Himself for our strength?

"Jehovah is my Banner," and Moses' rod is only a symbol. At most it is like a lightning-conductor, but it is not the lightning. The lightning will come without the rod if our eyes are to the heaven, for the true power that brings God down to men is that forsaking of externals and waiting upon Him which He never refuses to answer.

In like manner we are too apt to put far too much confidence in human teachers and human helpers of various kinds. And when God takes them away we say to ourselves that there is a gap that can never be filled. Aye! But the great sea can come in and fill any gap, and make the deepest and the driest of the excavations in the desert to abound in sweet water.

So let us turn away from everything external,

gather in our souls and fixing our hopes on Him ; let us recognise the imperative duty of the Christian warfare which is laid upon us ; let us docilely submit ourselves to His sweet commands, and trust in His sufficient and punctual guidance, and not expect from any outward sources that which no outward sources can ever give, but which He Himself will give—strength to our fingers to fight, and weapons for the warfare, and covering for our heads in the day of battle.

And then, when our lives are done, may the only inscription on the stone that covers us be Jehovah Nissi : the Lord is my Banner ! The trophy that commemorates the Christian's victory should bear no name but His by whose grace we are more than conquerors. "Thanks be to Him who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."



XXIII.

The Lord of Hosts, The God of Jacob.

“The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our Refuge.”—
PSALM xlv. 11.



OME great deliverance, the details of which we do not know, had been wrought for Israel, and this Psalmist comes forth, like Miriam with her choir of maidens, to hymn the victory. The psalm throbs with exultation, but no human victor's name degrades the singer's lips. There is only one Conquerer whom he celebrates. The deliverance has been "the work of the Lord"; the "desolations" that have been made on the "earth" "He has made." This great refrain of the song, which I have chosen for my text, takes the experience of deliverance as a proof in act of an astounding truth, and as a hope for the future. "The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our Refuge."

There is in these words a significant duplication of idea, both in regard of the names which are given to God, and of that which He is conceived as being to us ; and I desire now simply to try to bring

out the force of the consolation and strength which lie in these two epithets of His, and in the double wonder of His relation to us men.

I.—First, then, I ask you to look at the twin thoughts of God that are here. “The Lord of hosts . . . The God of Jacob.”

Now, with regard to the former of these grand names, it may be observed that it does not occur in the earliest stages of Revelation as recorded in the Old Testament. The first instance in which we find it is in the song of Hannah in the beginning of the first Book of Samuel; and it re-appears in the Davidic psalms and in psalms and prophecies of later date.

What “hosts” are they of which God is the Lord? Is that great title a mere synonym for the half-heathenish idea of the “God of battles”? By no means. True! He is the Lord of the armies of Israel, but the hosts which the Psalmist sees ranged in embattled array, and obedient to the command of the great Captain, are far other and grander than any earthly armies. If we would understand the whole depth and magnificent sweep of the idea enshrined in this name, we cannot do better than recall one or two other Scripture phrases. For instance, the account of the Creation in the Book of Genesis is ended by, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” Then, remember that, throughout the Old Testament, we meet constantly with the idea of the celestial bodies as being “the hosts of heaven.” And, still further, remember how, in one of the psalms, we hear the invocation to “all ye His hosts,” “ye ministers of His that do His pleasure,”

“the angels that excel in strength,” to praise and bless Him. If we put all these and a number of similar passages together, I think we shall come to this conclusion, that by that title, “the Lord of hosts,” the prophets and psalmists meant to express the universal dominion of God over the whole universe in all its battalions and sections, which they conceived of as one ranked army, obedient to the voice of the great General and Ruler of them all.

So the idea contained in the name is precisely parallel with that to which the heathen centurion in the Gospels had come, by reflecting upon the teaching of the legion in which he himself commanded, when he said, “I am a man under authority, having servants under me; and I say to this one, Go! and he goeth; to another, Come! and he cometh; to another, Do this! and he doeth it.” “Speak Thou the word!” To him Jesus Christ was Captain of the Lord’s hosts, and Ruler of all the ordered forces of the universe. The Old Testament name enshrines the same idea. The universe is an ordered whole. Science tells us that. Modern thought emphasises it. But how cruel, relentless, crushing, that conception may be unless we grasp the further thought which is presented in this great Name; and see, behind all the play of phenomena, the one Will which is the only power in the universe, and sways and orders all besides! The armies of heaven and every creature in the great *Cosmos* are the servants of this Lord. Then we can stand before the dreadful mysteries and the all but infinite complications of this mighty Whole, and say, “These are His soldiers, and He is their Captain, the Lord of hosts.”

Next we turn, by one quick bound, from the wide sweep of that mighty Name to the other, "The God of Jacob." The one carries us out among the glories of the universe, and shows us, behind them all, the personal Will of which they are the servants, and the Character of which they are the expressions. The other brings us down to the tent of the solitary wanderer, and shows us that that mighty Commander and Emperor enters into close, living, tender, personal relations with one poor soul, and binds himself by that great covenant, that is rooted in His love alone, to be the God who cares for and keeps and blesses the man in all his wanderings. Neither does the command of the mighty Whole hinder the closest relation to the individual, nor the care of the individual interfere with the direction of the Whole. The single soul stands out clear and isolated, as if there were none in the universe but God and himself; and the whole fulness of the Divine power, and all the tenderness of the God-heart, are lavished upon the individual, even though the armies of the skies wait upon His nod.

So, if we put the two names together, we get the completion of the great idea; and, whilst the one speaks to us of infinite power, of absolute supremacy, of universal rule, and so delivers us from the fear of nature, and from the blindness which sees only the material operations and not the working Hand that underlies them, the other speaks to us of gentle and loving and specific care, and holds out the hope that, between man and God, there may be a bond of friendship and of mutual possession so sweet and sacred that nothing else can compare with it. The God of

Jacob is the Lord of hosts. More wondrous still, the Lord of hosts is the God of Jacob.

II.—Note, secondly, the double wonder of our relation to this great God.

There is almost a tone of glad surprise, as well as of triumphant confidence, in this refrain of our psalm, which comes twice in it, and possibly ought to have come three times—at the end of each of its sections. The emphasis is to be laid on the “us” and the “our,” as if that was the miracle, and the fact which startled the Psalmist into the highest rapture of astonished thankfulness.

“The Lord of hosts is with *us*.” What does that say? It proclaims that wondrous truth that no gulf between the mighty Ruler of all and us, the insignificant little creatures that creep upon the face of this tiny planet, has any power of separating us from Him. It is always hard to believe that. It is harder to-day than it was when our Psalmist’s heart beat high at the thought. It is hard by reason of our sense-bound blindness, by reason of our superficial way of looking at things, which only shows us the nearest, and veils with their insignificances the magnitude of the furthest. Jupiter is blazing in our skies every night now; he is not one-thousandth part as great or bright as any one of the little needle-points of light, the fixed stars, that are so much further away; but he is nearer, and the intrusive brightness of the planet hides the modest glories of the distant and shrouded suns. Just so it is hard for us ever to realise, and to walk in the light of the realisation of, the fact that the Lord of hosts, the Emperor of all things, is of a truth with each of us.

It is harder to-day than ever it was; for we have learned to think rightly—or at least more rightly and approximately rightly—of the position and age of man upon this earth. The Psalmist's ancient question of devout thankfulness is too often travestied to-day into a question of scoffing or of melancholy unbelief; "When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy hands; what is man? Art Thou mindful of him?" This psalm comes to answer that. "The Lord of hosts is with us." True, we are but of yesterday, and know nothing. True, Earth is but a pin-point amidst the universe's glories. True! we are crushed down by sorrow and by care; and in some moods it seems supremely incredible that we should be of such worth in the scale of Creation as that the Lord of all things should, in a deeper sense than the Psalmist knew, have dwelt with us and be with us still. But bigness is not greatness, and there is nothing incredible in the belief that men, lower than the angels, and needing God more because of their sin, do receive His visitations in an altogether special sense, and that, passing by the lofty and the great that may inhabit His universe, His chariot wheels stoop to us, and that, because we are sinners, God is with us.

Let me remind you, dear brethren, of how this great thought of my text is heightened and transcended by the New Testament teaching. We believe in One whose name is Immanuel, *God with us*. Jesus Christ has come to be with men, not only during the brief years of His earthly ministry, in corporeal reality, but to be with all who love Him and trust Him in a far closer, more real, more deep, more precious, more operative Presence than when He

dwelt here. Through all the ages Christ Himself is with every soul that loves Him; and He will dwell beside *us* and bless *us* and keep *us*. God's presence means God's sympathy, God's knowledge, God's actual help, and these are ours if we will. Instead of staggering at the apparent improbability that so transcendent and mighty a Being should stoop from His throne, where He lords it over the Universe, and enter into the narrow room of our hearts, let us rather try to rise to the rapture of the astonished Psalmist when, looking upon the deliverance that had been wrought, this was the leading conviction that was written in flame upon his heart, "The Lord of hosts is with *us*."

And then the second of the wonders that are here set forth in regard to our relations to Him is, "the God of Jacob is *our* Refuge."

That carries for us the great truth that, just as the distance between us and God makes no separation, and the gulf is one that is bridged over by His love, so distance in time leads to no exhaustion of the Divine faithfulness and care, nor any diminution of the resources of His grace. "The God of Jacob is *our* Refuge." The story of the past is the prophecy of the future. What God has been to any man He will be to every man, if the man will let Him. There is nothing in any of these grand narratives of ancient days which is not capable of being reproduced in our lives. God drew near to Jacob when he was lying on the stony ground, and showed him the ladder set upon earth, with its top in the heavens, and the bright-winged soldiers and messengers of His will ascending and descending upon it, and His own face

at the top. God shows you and me that vision to-day. It was no vanishing splendour, no transient illumination, no hallucination of the man's own thoughts seeking after a helper, and the wish being father to the vision. But it was the unveiling for a moment, in supernatural fashion, of the abiding reality. "The God of Jacob is *our* Refuge"; and whatever He was to His servant of old He is to-day to you and me.

We say that miracle has ceased. Yes. But that which the miracle effected has not ceased; and that from which the miracle came has not ceased. The realities of a Divine protection, of a Divine supply, of a Divine guidance, of a Divine deliverance, of a Divine discipline, and of a Divine reward at the last, are as real to-day as when they were mediated by signs and wonders, by an open Heaven and by an out-stretched hand. They who went before have not emptied the treasures of the Father's house, nor eaten all the bread that He spreads upon the table. God has no step-children, and no favourite and spoiled ones. All that the elder brethren have had, we, on whom the ends of the dispensation are come, may have just as really; and whatever God has been to the patriarch He is to us to-day.

Remember the experience of the man of whom our text speaks. The God of Jacob manifested Himself to him as being a God who would draw near to, and care for, and help, a very unworthy and poor creature. Jacob was no saint at the beginning. Selfishness and cunning, and many a vice, clung very close to his character; but for all that, God drew near to him and cared for him and guided him, and promised that He

would not leave him till He had done that which He had spoken to him of. And He will do the same for us—blessed be His name!—with all our faults and weaknesses and craftiness and worldliness of sins. If He cared for that huckstering Jew, as He did, even in his earlier days, He will not put us away, because He finds faults in us. “The God of Jacob,” the supplanter, the trickster, “is our Refuge.”

But remember how the Divine Presence with that man had to be, because of his faults, a Presence that wrought him sorrows and forced him to undergo discipline. So it will be with us. He will not suffer sin upon us; He will pass us through the fire and the water; and do anything with us short of destroying us, in order to destroy the sin that is in us. He does not spare His rod for His child’s crying, but smites with judgment, and sends us sorrows “for our profit, that we should be partakers of His holiness.” We may write this as the explanation over most of our griefs—“the God of Jacob is our Refuge,” and He is disciplining us as He did him.

And remember what the end of the man was. “Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince thou hast power with God, and hast prevailed.” So if we have God, who out of such a sow’s ear made a silk purse, out of such a stone raised up a servant for Himself, we may be sure that His purpose in all discipline will be effected on us submissive, and we shall end where His ancient servant ended, and shall be in our turn princes with God.

Let me recall to you also the meaning which Jesus Christ found in this name. He quoted “the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob” as being the

great guarantee and proof to us of immortality. "The God of Jacob is our Refuge." If so, what can the grim and ghastly phantom of death do to us? He may smite upon the gate, but he cannot enter the fortress. The man who has knit himself to God by saying to God, "Lo! I am Thine, and Thou art mine," in that communion has a proof and a pledge that nothing shall ever break it, and that death is powerless. The fact of religion—true, heartfelt religion, with its communion, its prayer, its consciousness of possessing and of being possessed, makes the idea that death ends a man's conscious existence an absurdity and an impossibility.

"The God of Jacob is our Refuge." And so we may say to the storms of life, and after them to the last howling tornado of death—Blow winds and crack your cheeks, and do your worst, you cannot touch me in the fortress where I dwell. The wind will hurtle around the stronghold, but within there shall be calm.

Dear brethren, make sure that you are in the refuge. Make sure that you have fled for "refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel." "The Lord of hosts is with us," but you may be parted from Him. He is our Refuge, but you may be standing outside the sanctuary, and so exposed to all the storms. Flee thither, cast yourselves on Him, trust in that great Saviour who has given Himself for us, and who says to us, "Lo! I am with you always." Take Christ for your hiding-place by simple faith in Him and loving obedience, born of faith, and then the experience of our Psalmist will be yours. Your life will not want for deliverances which will thrill your heart with

thankfulness, and turn the truth of faith into a truth of experience. So you may set to your seals the great saying of our psalm, which is fresh to-day, though centuries have passed since it came glowing fiery from the lips of the ancient seer, and may take up as yours the great words in which Luther has translated it for our times, the "Marseillaise" of the Reformation—

A safe stronghold our God is still;
A trusty shield and weapon;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'ertaken.



XXIV.

The Perfect Law and its Doers.

“Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”—JAMES i. 25.



AN old tradition tells us that James, who was probably the writer of this letter, continued in the practice of Jewish piety all his life. He was surnamed “the Just.” He lived the life of a Nazarite. He was even admitted into the sanctuary of the Temple, and there spent so much of his time in praying for the forgiveness of the people that, in the vivid language of the old writer, his “knees were hard and worn like a camel’s.” To such a man the Gospel would naturally present itself as “a law,” which word expressed the highest form of revelation with which he was familiar; and to him the glory of Christ’s message would be that it was the perfecting of an earlier utterance, moving on the same plane as it did, but infinitely greater.

Now that, of course, is somewhat different from the point of view from which, for instance, Paul regards the relation of the Gospel and the Law. To him they

are rather antitheses. He conceived mainly of the law as a system of outward observances, incapable of fulfilment, and valuable as impressing upon men the consciousness of sin.

But, though there is diversity, there is no contradiction, any more than there is between the two pictures in a stereoscope, which, united, represent one solid reality. The two men simply regard the subject from slightly different angles. Paul would have said that the Gospel was the perfection of the law, as indeed he does say that by faith we do not make void, but establish, the law. And James would have said that the law, in Paul's sense, was a yoke of bondage, as indeed he does say in my text, that the Gospel, in contrast with the earlier revelation, is the law of liberty.

And so the two men complement and do not contradict each other. In like manner, the earnest urging of work and insisting upon conduct, which are the keynote of this letter, are no contradiction of Paul. The one writer begins at a later point than the other. Paul is a preacher of faith, but of faith which works by love. James is the preacher of works, but of works which are the fruit of faith.

There are three things here on which I touch now. First, the perfect law; second, the doers of the perfect law; and, third, the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law.

I.—First, then, the perfect law.

I need not dwell further upon James' conception of the Gospel as being a law; the authoritative standard and rule of human conduct. Let me remind you how, in every part of the revelation of Divine

truth contained in the Gospel, there is a direct moral and practical bearing. No word of the New Testament is given to us only in order that we may know truth, but all in order that we may do it. Every part of it palpitates with life, and is meant to regulate conduct. There are plenty of truths of which it does not matter whether a man believes them or not, in so far as his conduct is concerned. Mathematical truth or scientific truth leaves conduct unaffected. But no man can believe the principles that are laid down in the New Testament, and the truths that are unveiled there, without their laying a masterful grip upon his life, and influencing all that he is.

And let me remind you, too, how in the very central fact of the Gospel there lies the most stringent rule of life. Jesus Christ is the Pattern, and from those gentle lips which say, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," law sounds more imperatively than from all the thunder and trumpets of Sinai.

Let me remind you, too, how in the great act of redemption, which is the central fact of the New Testament revelation, there lies a law for conduct. God's love redeeming us is the revelation of what we ought to be, and the Cross, to which we look as the refuge from sin and condemnation, is also the pattern for the life of every believer. "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." A revelation, therefore, of which every truth, to the minutest fibre of the great web, has in it a directly practical bearing; a revelation which is all centred and focussed in the life which is example because it is deliverance; a revelation, of which the vital heart is the redeeming act which sets before us

the outlines of our conduct, and the model for our imitation—is a law just because it is a gospel.

Such thoughts as these are needful as a counterpoise to one-sided views which otherwise would be disastrous. God forbid that the thought of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as primarily a message of reconciliation and pardon, and providing a means of escape from the frightful consequences of sin, even separation from God, should ever be put in the background! But the very ardour and intensity of man's recognition of that as the first shape which Christianity assumes to sinful men, has sometimes led, and is always in possible danger of leading, to putting all other aspects of the Gospel in the background. Some of you, for instance, when a preacher talks to you about plain duties, and insists upon conduct and practical righteousness, are ready to say, "He is not preaching the Gospel." Neither is he, if he does not present these duties and this practical righteousness as the fruits of faith, or if he presents them as the means of winning salvation. But if your conception of Christianity has not grasped it as being a stringent rule of life, you need to go to school to James, the servant of God, and do not yet understand the message of his brother Paul. The Gospel is a Redemption. Yes! God be thanked; but because a Redemption, it is a Law.

Again, this thought gives the necessary counterpoise to the tendency to substitute the mere intellectual grasp of Christian truth for the practical doing of it. There will be plenty of orthodox Christians and theological professors and students who will find themselves, to their very great surprise,

amongst the goats at last. Not what we believe, but what we do, is our Christianity ; only the doing must be rooted in belief.

In like manner, take this vivid conception of the Gospel as a law ; as a counterpoise to the tendency to place religion in mere emotion and feeling. Fire is very good, but its best purpose is to get up steam which will drive the wheels of the engine. There is a vast deal of lazy selfishness masquerading under the guise of sweet and sacred devout emotion. Not what we feel, but what we do, is our Christianity.

Further, notice how this law is a perfect law. James' idea, I suppose, in that epithet, is not so much the completeness of the code, or the loftiness and absoluteness of the ideal which is set forth in the Gospel as the relation between the law and its doer. He is stating the same thought of which the Psalmist of old time had caught a glimpse. "The law of the Lord is perfect," because it "converts the soul." That is to say, the weakness of all commandment—whether it be the law of a nation, or the law of moral textbooks, or the law of conscience, or of public opinion, or the like—the weakness of all positive statute is that it stands there, over against a man, and points a stony finger to the stony tables, "Thou shalt !" "Thou shalt not !" but stretches out no hand to help us in keeping the commandment. It simply enjoins, and so is weak ; like the proclamations of some discrowned king who has no army at his back to enforce them, and which flutter as waste paper on the barn-doors, and do nothing to secure allegiance. But, says James, this law is perfect—because it is more than law, and transcends the simple function of command. It not

only tells us what to do, but it gives us power to do it; and that is what men want. The world knows what it ought to do well enough. There is no need for heaven to be rent, and Divine voices to come to tell men what is right and wrong; they carry an all but absolutely sufficient guide as to that within their own minds. But there is need to bring them something which shall be more than commandment, which shall be both law and power, both the exhibition of duty and the gift of capacity to discharge it.

The Gospel brings power because it brings life. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law." In the Gospel that desideratum is supplied. Here is the law which vitalizes and so gives power. The life which the Gospel brings will unfold itself after its own nature, and so produce the obedience which the law of the Gospel requires.

Therefore, says James further, this perfect law is freedom. Of course, liberty is not exemption from commandment, but the harmony of will with commandment. Whosoever finds that what is his duty is his delight is enfranchised. We are set at liberty when we walk within the limits of that Gospel; and they who delight to do the law are free in obedience; free from the tyranny of their own lusts, passions, inclinations; free from the domination of men and opinion and common customs and personal habits. All those bonds are burnt in the fiery furnace of love into which they pass; and where they walk transfigured and at liberty, because they keep that law. Freedom comes from the reception into the heart of the Life whose motions coincide with the commandments of the

Gospel. Then the burden that I carry carries me, and the limits within which I am confined are the merciful fences put up on the edge of the cliff to keep the traveller from falling over and being dashed to pieces beneath.

II.—Now notice, secondly, the doers of the perfect law.

James has a long prelude before he comes to the doing. Several things are required as preliminary. The first step is, "looketh into the law."

The word employed here is a very picturesque and striking one. Its force may be seen if I quote to you the other instances of its occurrence in the New Testament. It is employed in the accounts of the Resurrection to describe the attitude and action of Peter, John, and Mary as they "stooped down and looked into" the empty sepulchre. In all these cases the Revised Version translates the word as I have just done, "stooping and looking," both acts being implied in it. It is also employed by Peter when he tells us that the "angels desire to look into" the mysteries of Redemption, in which saying, perhaps, there may be some allusion to the silent, bending figures of the twin cherubim who, with folded wings and fixed eyes, curved themselves above the mercy-seat, and looked down upon that mystery of propitiating love. With such fixed and steadfast gaze we must contemplate the perfect law of liberty if we are ever to be doers of the same.

A second requirement is, "and continueth." The gaze must be, not only concentrated, but constant, if anything is to come of it. Old legends tell that the looker into a magic crystal saw nothing at first, but,

as he gazed, there gradually formed themselves in the clear sphere filmy shapes, which grew firmer and more distinct until they stood plain. The raw hide dipped into the vat with tannin in it, and at once pulled out again, will never be turned into leather. Many of you do not give the motives and principles of the Gospel, which you say you believe, a chance of influencing you because so interruptedly, and spasmodically, and at such long intervals, and for so few moments, do you gaze upon them. Steadfast and continued attention is needful if we are to be "doers of the work."

Let me venture on two or three simple practical exhortations. Cultivate the habit, then, of contemplating the central truths of the Gospel, as the condition of receiving in vigour and fulness the life which obeys the commandment. There is no mystery about the way by which that new life is given to men. James tells us here, in the immediate context, how it is. He speaks of "God of His own will begetting us with the *word of truth*"; and of the "engrafted word, which," being engrafted, "is able to save your souls." Get that word—the principles of the Gospel and the truths of revelation, which are all enshrined and incarnated in Jesus Christ—into your minds and hearts by continual, believing contemplation of it, and the new life, which is obedience, will surely spring. But if you look at the Gospel of your salvation as seldom and as superficially and with as passing glances as so many of you expend upon it, no wonder that you are such weaklings as so many of you are, and that you find such a gulf between your uncircumcised inclinations and the commandment of the living God.

Cultivate this habit of reflective meditation upon the truths of the Gospel as giving you the pattern of duty in a concentrated and available form. It is of no use to carry about a copy of the "Statutes at Large" in twenty folio volumes in order to refer to it when difficulties arise and crises come. We must have something a great deal more compendious and easy of reference than that. A man's cabin-trunk must not be as big as a house, and his goods must be in a small compass for his sea voyage. We have in Jesus Christ the "Statutes at Large," codified and put into a form which the poorest and humblest and busiest amongst us can apply directly to the sudden emergencies and surprising contingencies of daily life, which are always sprung upon us when we do not expect them and demand instantaneous decision. We have in Christ the pattern of all conduct. But only those who have been accustomed to meditate upon Him, and on the truths that flow from His life and death, will find that the sword is ready when it is needed, and that the guide is at their side when they are in perplexity.

Cultivate the habit of meditating on the truths of the Gospel, in order that the motives of conduct may be reinvigorated and strengthened. And remember that only by long and habitual abiding in the secret place of the Most High, and entertaining the thoughts of His infinite love to us, as the continual attitude of our daily life, shall we be able to respond to His love with the thankfulness which springs to obedience as a delight, and knows no joy like the joy of serving such a Friend.

These requirements being met, next comes the

doing. There must precede all true doing of the law this gazing into it, steadfast and continued. We shall not obey the commandment except, first, we have received and welcomed the salvation. There must be, first, faith, and then obedience. Only he who has received the Gospel in the love of it will find that the Gospel is the law which regulates his conduct. "Faith without works is dead"; works without faith are rootless flowers, or bricks hastily and incompletely huddled together without the binding straw.

But, further, the text suggests that the natural crown of all contemplation and knowledge is practical obedience. Make of all your creed deed. Let everything you believe be a principle of action too; your *credenda* translate into *agenda*. And, on the other hand, let every deed be informed by your creed, and no schism exist between what you are and what you believe.

III.—Lastly, note the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law. There is an echo in the words of my text, of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, the form in which the Gospel was, perhaps, dearest to this apostle. He uses the same word—"Blessed."

Notice the *in*, not "after," not "as a reward for," but "blessed *in* his deed." It is the saying of the Psalmist over again, whose words we have already seen partly reproduced in the former portion of this text, who, in the same great psalm, says: "*In* keeping Thy commandments there is great reward." The rewards of this law are not arbitrarily bestowed, separately from the act of obedience, by the will of the Judge, but the deeds of obedience automatically bring the blessedness. This world is not so constituted as that

outward rewards certainly follow on inward goodness. Few of its prizes fall to the lot of the saints. But men are so constituted as that obedience is its own reward. There is no delight so deep and true as the delight of doing the will of Him whom we love. There is no blessedness like that of an increasing communion with God, and of the clearer perception of His will and mind which follow obedience as surely as the shadow does the sunshine. There is no blessedness like the glow of approving conscience, the reflection of the smile on Christ's face.

To have the heart in close communion with the very Fountain of all good, and the will in harmony with the will of the best Beloved; to hear the Voice that is dearest of all, ever saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it"; to feel "a spirit in my feet" impelling me upon that road; to know that all my petty deeds are made great, and my stained offerings hallowed by the altar on which they are honoured to lie; and to be conscious of fellowship with the Friend of my soul increased by obedience; this is to taste the keenest joy and good of life, and he who is thus "blessed in his deed" need never fear that that blessedness shall be taken away, nor sorrow though other joys be few and griefs be many.

But, remember, first believe, then work. We must begin where Paul told the Philippian gaoler to begin—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"—if we are to end where James leads us. Do not begin your building at the roof, but put in the foundations deep in penitence and faith. And then, let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.

XXV.

River and Rock.

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—1 JOHN ii. 17.



JOHN has been solemnly giving a charge not to love the world, nor the things that are in it. That charge was addressed to “children,” “young men,” “fathers.” Whether these designations be taken as referring to the growth and maturity of Christian experience, or of natural life, they equally carry the lesson that no age and no stage is beyond the danger of being drawn away by the world’s love, or beyond the need of the solemn dehortation therefrom.

My text is the second of the reasons which the Apostle gives for his earnest charge. We all, therefore, need it, and we always need it; though, this evening, on the last Sunday of another year, it may be more than usually appropriate to turn our thoughts in its direction. “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.” Let us lay that handful of snow on our fevered foreheads and cool our desires.

Now, there are but two things set forth in this text

which is a great and wonderful antithesis between something which is in perpetual flux and passage and something which is permanent. If I might venture to cast the two thoughts into metaphorical form, I should say that here are a river and a rock. The one, the sad truth of sense, universally believed and as universally forgotten; the other, the glad truth of faith, so little regarded or operative in men's lives.

I ask you, then, to look with me for a few moments at each of these thoughts.

I.—First, then, the river, or the sad truth of sense.

Now you observe that there are two things in my text of which this transiency is predicated, the one "the world," the other "the lust thereof"; the one outside us, the other within us. As to the former, I need only, I suppose, remind you in a sentence that what John means by "the world" is not the material globe on which we dwell, but the whole aggregate of things visible and material, together with the lives of the men whose lives are directed to, and bounded by, that visible and material, and all considered as wrenched apart from God. That, and not the mere external physical creation, is what he means by "the world," and therefore the passing away of which he speaks is not only (although, of course, it includes) the decay and dissolution of material things, but the transiency of things which are or have to do with the visible, and are separated by us from God. Over all these, he says, there is written the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." There is a continual flowing on of the stream. As the original implies even more strongly than in our translation, "the world" is in the act of "passing away."

Like the slow travelling of the scenes of some moveable panorama which glide along, even as the eye looks upon them, and are concealed behind the side flats, before the gazer has taken in the whole picture, so equably, constantly, silently, and therefore unnoticed by us, all is in a state of continual motion. There is no *present* time. Even whilst we name the moment it dies. The drop hangs for an instant on the verge, gleaming in the sunlight, and then falls into the gloomy abyss that silently sucks up years and centuries. There is no present, but all is movement.

Brethren, that has been the commonplace of moralists and poets and preachers from the beginning of time; and it would be folly for me to suppose that I can add anything to the impressiveness of the thought. All that I want to do is to wake you up to preach it to yourselves, for that is the only thing that is of any use.

So passeth, in the passing of an hour
Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower.

But besides this transiency external to us, John finds a corresponding transiency within us. "The world passeth, and the lust thereof." Of course the word "lust" is employed by him in a much wider sense than in our use of it. With us it means one specific and very ugly form of earthly desire. With him it includes the whole genus—all desires of every sort, more or less noble or ignoble, which have this for their characteristic, that they are directed to, stimulated by, and fed or starved on, the fleeting things of this outward life. If thus a man has anchored himself to that which has no perpetual stay, so long as the

cable holds he follows the fate of the thing to which he has pinned himself. And if it perish he perishes, in a very profound sense, with it. If you trust yourselves in the leaky vessel, when the water rises in *it* it will drown *you*, and you will go to the bottom with the craft to which you have trusted yourselves. If you embark in the little ship that carries Christ and His fortunes, you will come with Him to the haven.

But these fleeting desires, of which my text speaks, point to that sad feature of human experience, that we all outgrow and leave behind us, and think of very little value, the things that once to us were all but heaven. There was a time when toys and sweetmeats were our treasures, and since that day how many burnt-out hopes we all have had! How little we should know ourselves if we could go back to the fears and wishes and desires that used to agitate us ten, twenty, thirty years ago! They lie behind us, no longer part of ourselves; they have slipped away from us, and

We all are changed, by still degrees,
All but the basis of the soul.

The self-conscious same man abides, and yet how different the same man is! Our lives, then, will zig-zag instead of keeping a straight course, if we let desires that are limited by anything that we can see guide and regulate us.

But, brethren, though it be a digression from my text, I cannot help touching for a moment upon a yet sadder thought than that. There are desires that *remain*, when the gratification of them has become impossible. Sometimes the lust outlasts the world, some-

times the world outlasts the lust ; and one knows not whether is the sadder. There is a hell upon earth for many of us who, having set our affections upon some creatural object, and having had that withdrawn from us, are ready to say, "They have taken away my gods ! And what shall I do ?" And there is a hell of the same sort waiting beyond those dark gates through which we have all to pass, where men who never desired anything, except what the world that has slipped out of their reluctant fingers could give them, are shut up with impossible longings after a for ever vanished good. "Father Abraham ! a drop of water ; for I am tormented in this flame." That is what men come to, if the fire of their lust burn after its objects are withdrawn.

But let me remind you that this transiency of which I have been speaking receives very strange treatment from most of us. I do not know that it is altogether to be regretted that it so seldom comes to men's consciousness. Perhaps it is right that it should not be uppermost in our thoughts always ; but yet there is no vindication for the entire oblivion to which we condemn it. The march of these fleeting things is like that of cavalry with their horses' feet wrapped in straw, in the night, across the snow, silent and unnoticed. We cannot realize the revolution of the earth, because everything partakes in it. We talk about standing still, and we are whirling through space with inconceivable rapidity. By a like illusion we deceive ourselves with the notion of stability, when everything about us is hastening away. Some of you do not like to be reminded of it, and think it a killjoy. You try to get rid of the thought, and hide your

head in the sand, and fancy that the rest of your body presents no mark to the archer's arrow. Now, surely common sense says to all, that if there be some fact certain and plain and applying to you, which, if accepted, would profoundly modify your life, you ought to take it into account. And what I want you to do, dear friends, to-night, is to look in the face this fact, which you all acknowledge so utterly that some of you are ready to say, "What was the use of coming to a chapel to hear that threadbare old thing dinned into my ears again?" and to take it into account in shaping your lives. Have you done so? Have you? Suppose a man that lived in a land habitually shaken by earthquakes were to say, "I mean to ignore the fact; and I am going to build a house just as if there was not such a thing as an earthquake expected;" he would have it toppling about his ears very soon. Suppose a man upon the ice-slopes of the Alps was to say, "I am going to ignore slipperiness and gravitation," he would before long find himself, if there was any consciousness left in him, at the bottom of a precipice, bruised and bleeding. And suppose a man says, "I am not going to take the fleetingness of the things of earth into account at all, but intend to live as if all things were to remain as they are;" what would become of him do you think? Is he a wise man or a fool? And is he *you*? He *is* some of you! "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Then, let me say to you, see that you take noble lessons out of these undeniable and all-important facts. There is one kind of lesson that I do not want you to take out of it. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow

we die," or, to put it into a more vulgar formula, "A short life and a merry one." The mere contemplation of the transiency of earthly things may, and often does, lend itself to very ignoble conclusions, and men draw from it the thought that, as life is short, they had better crowd into it as much of sensual enjoyment as they can.

"Gather ye roses while ye may" is a very common keynote, struck by poets of the baser sort. And it is a thought that influences some of us, I have little doubt. Or there may be another consideration. "Make hay whilst the sun shines." "Hurry on your getting rich, because you have not very long to do it in"; or the like.

Now all that is supremely unworthy. The true lesson to be drawn is the plain, old one which it is never superfluous to shout into men's ears, until they have obeyed it—viz., "Set not thine heart on that which is not; and which flieth away as an eagle towards heaven." Do you, dear brother, see to it, that your roots go down through the gravel on the surface. Do you see to it that you dig deeper than that; and thrusting your hand, as it were, through the thin, silk-paper screen that stands between you and the Eternal, grasp the hand that you will find on the other side, waiting and ready to clasp you, and to hold you up.

When they build a new house in Rome they have to dig down through sometimes sixty or a hundred feet of rubbish that runs like water, the ruins of old temples and palaces, once occupied by men in the same flush of life in which we are now. We, too, have to dig down through ruins, until we get to Rock

and build there, and build secure. Withdraw your affections and your thoughts and your desires from the fleeting, and fix them on the permanent. If a captain takes anything but the pole star for his fixed point he will lose his reckoning, and his ship will be on the reefs. If we take anything but God for our supreme delight and desire we shall perish.

Then let me say, too, let this thought stimulate us to crowd every moment, as full as it can be packed, with noble work and heavenly thoughts. These fleeting things are elastic, and you may put all but infinite treasure into them. Think of what the possibilities, for each of us, of this dying year were on the 1st of January; and of what the realisation has been by the 28th of December. So much that we could have done; so little that we have done! So many ripples of the river have passed, bearing no golden sand to pile upon the shore! "We have been" is a sad word; but oh! the one sad word is, "We might have been." And, so, do you see to it that you fill time with that which is kindred to eternity, and make "one day as a thousand years" in the elastic possibilities and realities of consecration and of service.

Further, let the thought help us to the conviction of the relative insignificance of all that can change. That will not spoil nor shade any real joy; rather it will add to it poignancy that prevents it from cloying or from becoming the enemy of our souls. But the thought will wondrously lighten the burden that we have to carry, and the tasks which we have to perform. "But for a moment," makes all light. There was an old rabbi, long ago, whose real name was

all but lost, because everybody nick-named him "Rabbi This-also." The reason was because he had perpetually on his lips the saying about everything as it came, "This also will pass." He was a wise man. Let us go to his school and learn his wisdom.

II.—Now, let me say a word, and it can only be a word, about the second of the thoughts here, which I designated as the Rock, or the glad truth of Faith.

We might have expected that John's antithesis to the world that passeth would have been the God that abides. But he does not so word his sentence, although the thought of the Divine permanence underlies it. Rather over against the fleeting world he puts the abiding man who does the will of God.

Of course there is a very solemn sense in which all men, even they who have most exclusively lived for what they call the present, do last for ever, and in which their deeds do so too. After death is the judgment, and the issues of eternity depend upon the actions of time; and every fleeting thought comes back to the hand that projected it, like the Australian savage's boomerang that, flung out, returns and falls at the feet of the thrower. But that is not what John means by "abiding for ever." He means something very much more blessed and lofty than that; and the following is the course of his thought. There is only one permanent Reality in the universe, and that is God. All else is shadow and He is the substance. All else was, is, and is not. He is the One who was, is, and is to come, the timeless and only permanent Being. The will of God is the permanent element in all changeful material things. And consequently he who does the will of God links himself with the Divine Eternity, and

becomes partaker of that solemn and blessed Being which lives above mutation.

Obedience to God's will is the permanent element in human life. Whosoever humbly and trustfully seeks to mould his will after the Divine will, and to bring God's will into practice in his doings, that man has pierced through the shadows and grasped the substance, and partakes of the Immortality which he adores and serves. Himself shall live for ever in the true life which is blessedness. His deeds shall live for ever when all that lifted itself in opposition to the Divine will shall be crushed and annihilated. They shall live in His own peaceful consciousness; they shall live in the blessed rewards which they shall bring to the doers. His habits will need no change.

What will you do when you are dead? You have to go into a world where there are no gossip and no housekeeping; no mills and no offices; no shops, no books; no colleges and no sciences to learn. What will you do there? "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." If you have done your house-keeping, and your weaving and spinning, and your book-keeping, and your buying and selling, and your studying, and your experimenting with a conscious reference to God, it is all right.

That has made the act capable of eternity, and there will be no need for such a man to change. The material on which he works will change, but the inner substance of his life will be unaffected by the trivial change from earth to heaven. Whilst the endless ages roll he will be doing just what he was doing down here; only here he was playing with counters, and yonder he will be trusted with gold, and dominion

over ten cities. To all other men the change that comes when earth passes from them, or they from it, is as when a trench is dug across a railway, into which the express goes with a smash, and there is an end. To the man who, in the trifles of time, has been obeying the will of God, and therefore subserving eternity and his interests there, the trench is bridged, and he will go on after he crosses it just as he did before, with the same purpose, the same desires, the same submission, and the same drinking into himself of the fulness of immortal life.

Brother, John tells us that obedience to the will of God brings permanence into our fleeting years. But how are we to obey the will of God? John tells us that the only way is by love. But how are we to love God? John tells us that the only way to love—which love is the only way to obedience—is by knowing and believing the love that God hath to us. But how are we to know that God hath love to us? John tells us that the only way to know the love of God, which is the only way of our loving Him, which in its turn is the only way to obedience, which again is the only way to permanence of life, is to believe in Jesus Christ and His propitiation for our sins. The river flows on forever, but it sweeps round the base of the Rock of Ages. And in Him, by faith in His blood, we may find our sure refuge and eternal home.



XXVI.

Blessed and Tragic Unconsciousness.

“Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.”—EXODUS xxxiv. 29.

“And Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him.”—JUDGES xvi. 20.



THE recurrence of the same phrase in two such opposite connections is very striking. Moses, fresh from the mountain of vision, where he had gazed on as much of the glory of God as was accessible to man, caught some gleam of the light which he adoringly beheld; and a strange radiance sat on his face, unseen by himself, but visible to all others. So, supreme beauty of character comes from beholding God, and talking with Him; and the bearer of it is unconscious of it.

Samson, fresh from his coarse debauch, and shorn of the locks which he had vowed to keep, strides out into the air, and tries his former feats; but his strength has left him because the Lord has left him; and the Lord has left him because, in his fleshly animalism, he has left the Lord. Like, but most unlike, Moses, he knows not his weakness. So strength, like beauty, is dependent upon contact with God; and

may ebb away when that is broken, and the man may be all unaware of his weakness till he tries his power, and ignominiously fails.

These two contrasted pictures, the one so mysteriously grand and the other so tragic, may well help to illustrate for us truths that should be burned into our minds and our memories.

I.—Note, then, the first thought which they teach us in common. Beauty and strength come from communion with God.

In both the cases with which we are dealing these were of a merely material sort. The light on Moses' face and the strength in Samson's arm were, at the highest, but types of something far higher and nobler than themselves. But still, the presence of the one and the departure of the other alike teach us the conditions on which we may possess both in nobler form; and the certainty of losing them if we lose hold of God.

Moses' experience teaches us that the loftiest beauty of character comes from communion with God. That is the use that the Apostle makes of this remarkable incident in 2 Cor. iii., where he takes the light that shone from Moses' face as being the symbol of the better lustre that gleams from all those who behold (or reflect) the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, and, by beholding, are changed into the likeness of that on which they gaze with adoration and longing. The great law to which, almost exclusively, Christianity commits the perfecting of individual character is this: Look at Him till you are like Him, and, in beholding, be changed. "Tell me the company a man keeps, and I will tell you his character," says the

old proverb. And what is true on the lower levels of daily life, that most men become assimilated to the complexion of those around them, especially if they admire or love them, is the great principle whereby worship, which is desire and longing and admiration in the superlative degree, stamps the image of the worshipped upon the character of the worshipper. "They followed after vanity, and have become vain," says one of the prophets, gathering up into a sentence the whole philosophy of the degradation of humanity, by reason of idolatry and the worship of false gods. "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." The law works upwards as well as downwards, for Whom we worship we declare to be infinitely good; Whom we worship we long to be like; Whom we worship we shall certainly imitate.

Thus, brethren, the practical, plain lesson that comes from this thought is simply this. If you want to be pure and good, noble and gentle, sweet and tender; if you desire to be delivered from your own weaknesses and selfish, sinful idiosyncrasies, the way to secure your desire is, "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Contemplation, which is love and longing, is the parent of all effort that succeeds. Contemplation of God in Christ is the master-key that opens this door, and makes it possible for the lowliest and the foulest amongst us to cherish unpresumptuous hopes of "being like Him" if we see Him as He is revealed here, and perfectly like Him when yonder we see Him as He is.

There have been in the past, and there are to-day,

thousands of simple souls shut out by lowliness of position and other circumstances from all the refining and ennobling influences of which the world makes so much, who yet in character and bearing, aye, and sometimes in the very look of their meek faces, are living witnesses how true and mighty to transform a nature is the power of loving gazing upon Jesus Christ. All of us who have had much to do with Christians of the humbler classes know that. There is no influence to refine and beautify men like that of living near Jesus Christ, and walking in the light of that Beauty which is the effulgence of the Divine glory and the express image of His Person.

And in like manner as beauty, so strength comes from communion with God, and laying hold on Him. We can only talk about Samson as a saint in a very modified fashion, and present him as an example in a very limited degree. His dependence upon Divine power was rude, and divorced from elevation of character and morality, but howsoever imperfect, fragmentary, and I might almost say to our more trained eyes, grotesque, it looks, yet there was a reality in it; and when the man was faithless to his vow, and allowed the crafty harlot's scissors to shear from his head the token of his consecration, it was because the reality of the consecration, rude and external as that consecration was, both in itself and in its consequences, had passed away from Him.

And so we may learn the lesson, taught at once by the flashing face of the Lawgiver and the enfeebled force of the hero, that the two poles of perfectness in humanity, so often divorced from one another—beauty and strength, have one common source, and

depend for their loftiest position upon the same thing. God possesses both in supremest degree, being the Almighty and the Allfair; and we possess them in limited, but yet possibly progressive, measure, through dependence upon Him. The true force of character, and the true power for work, and every real strength which is not disguised weakness, "a lath painted to look like iron," comes on condition of our keeping close by God. The Fountain is open for you all; see to it that you resort thither.

II.—And now the second thought of my texts is, the bearer of the radiance is unconscious of it.

"Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone." In all regions of life, the consummate apex and crowning charm of excellence is unconsciousness of excellence. Whenever a man begins to suspect that he is good he begins to be bad; and you rob every virtue and beauty of character of some portion of its attractive fairness when the man who bears it knows, or fancies that he knows, it. The charm of childhood is its perfect unconsciousness, and the man has to win back the child's heritage, and become as a little child, if he would enter into and dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven. And so in the loftiest region of all, that of the religious life, you may be sure that the more a man is like Christ, the less he knows it; and the better he is, the less he suspects it. The reasons why that is so point, at the same time, to the ways by which we may attain to this blessed self-oblivion. So let me put just in a word or two some simple, practical thoughts.

Let us, then, try to lose ourselves in Jesus Christ. That way of self-oblivion is emancipation and blessed-

ness and power. It is safe for us to leave all thoughts of our miserable selves behind us, if instead of them we have the thought of that great, sweet, dear Lord, filling mind and heart. A man walking on a tight-rope will be far more likely to fall, if he is looking at his toes, than if he is looking at the point to which he is going. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, then we can safely look, neither to our feet nor to the gulfs, but straight at Him gazing, we shall straight to Him advance. "Looking off" from ourselves "unto Jesus" is safe. Looking off anywhere else is peril. Seek that self-oblivion which comes from self being swallowed up in the thought of the Lord.

And, again, I would say, think constantly and longingly of the unattained. "Brethren! I count not myself to have apprehended." Endless aspiration and a stinging consciousness of present imperfection are the loftiest states of man here below. The people down in the valley, when they look up, may see our figures against the sky line, and fancy us at the summit, but our loftier elevation reveals untrodden heights beyond; and we have only risen so high in order to discern more clearly how much higher we have to rise. Dissatisfaction with the present is the condition of excellence in all pursuits of life; and in the Christian life even more eminently than in all others, because the goal to be attained is in its very nature infinite; and therefore ensures the blessed certainty of continual progress, accompanied here, indeed, with the sting and bite of a sense of imperfection, but one day to be only sweetness, as we think of how much there is yet to be won in addition to the perfection of the present.

So, dear friends, the best way to keep unconscious of present attainments is to set our faces forward, and to make "all experience" as "an arch wherethro' gleams that untravelled world to which we move." "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone."

The third practical suggestion that I would make is, cultivate a clear sense of your own imperfections. We do not need to try to learn our goodness. That will suggest itself to us only too clearly; but what we do need is to have a very clear sense of our shortcomings and failures, our faults of temper, our faults of desire, our faults in our relations to our fellows, and all the other evils that still buzz and sting and poison our blood. Has not the best of us enough of these to knock all the conceit out of us? A true man will never be so much ashamed of himself as when he is praised, for it will always send him to look into the deep places of his heart, and there will be plenty of ugly, creeping things under the stones there, if he will only turn them up and look beneath. So let us lose ourselves in Christ, let us set our faces to the unattained future, let us clearly understand our own faults and sins.

III.—Thirdly, the strong man made weak is unconscious of his weakness.

I do not mean here to touch at all upon the general thought that, by its very nature, all evil tends to make us insensitive to its presence. Conscience becomes dull by practice of sin and by neglect of conscience, until that which at first was as sensitive as the palm of a little child's hand becomes as if it were "seared with a hot iron." The foulness of the atmosphere of a crowded hall is not perceived by the people

in it. It needs a man to come in from the outer air to detect it. We can accustom ourselves to any mephitic and poisonous atmosphere, and many of us live in one all our days, and do not know that there is any need of ventilation or that the air is not perfectly sweet. The deceitfulness of sin is its great weapon.

But what I desire to point out is an even sadder thing than that—namely, that Christian people may lose their strength because they let go their hold upon God, and know nothing about it. Spiritual declension, all unconscious of its own existence, is the very history of hundreds of nominal Christians amongst us, and, I dare say, of some that are listening to me now. The very fact that you do not suppose the statement to have the least application to yourself is perhaps the very sign that it has. When the lifeblood is pouring out of a man he faints before he dies. The swoon of unconsciousness is the condition of some professing Christians. Frost-bitten limbs are quite comfortable, and only tingle when circulation is coming back. I remember a great elm tree, the pride of an avenue in the south, that had spread its branches for more years than the oldest man could count, and stood, leafy and green. Not until a winter storm came one night and laid it low with a crash did anybody suspect what everybody saw in the morning—that the heart was eaten out of it, and nothing left but a shell of bark. Some Christian people are like that; they manage leaves, and even some fruit, but when the storm comes they will go down, because the heart has been out of their religion for years. “Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him.”

And so, brother, because there are so many things that mask the ebbing away of a Christian life, and because our own self-love and habits come in to hide declension, let me earnestly exhort you and myself to watch ourselves very narrowly. Unconsciousness does not mean ignorant presumption or presumptuous ignorance. It is difficult to make an estimate of ourselves by poking into our own sentiments and supposed feelings and convictions, and the estimate is likely to be wrong. There is a better way than that. Two things tell what a man is—one, what he wants, and the other, what he does. As the will is, the man is. Where do the currents of your desires set? If you watch their flow, you may be pretty sure whether your religious life is an ebbing or a rising tide. The other way to ascertain what we are is rigidly to examine and judge what we do. "Let us search and try our *ways*, and turn again to the Lord." Actions are the true test of a man. Conduct is the best illumination of character, especially in regard to ourselves. So watch, and be sober—sober in our estimate of ourselves, and determined to find every lurking evil, and to drag it forth into the light.

Again, let me say, let us ask God to help us. "Search me, O God, and try me." We shall never rightly understand what we are unless we spread ourselves out before Him, and crave that Divine Spirit, which is the candle of the Lord, to be carried even in our hands into the secret recesses of our sinful hearts. "Anoint thine eyes with eye salve that thou mayest see," and get the eye salve by communion with God, who will supply thee a standard by which to try thy poor, stained, ragged righteousness. The

collyrium, the eye salve, may be, will be, painful when it is rubbed into the lids, but it will clear the sight ; and the first work of Him, whose dearest name is *Comforter*, is to convince of sin.

And, last of all, let us keep near to Jesus Christ, near enough to Him to feel His touch, to hear His voice, to see His face, and to carry down with us into the valley some radiance on our countenances which may tell, even the world, that we have been up where the Light lives and reigns.

“ Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.”



XXVII.

The Risen Lord's Greetings and Gifts.

“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail!”—MATT. xxviii. 9.

“Then the same day at evening . . . came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”—JOHN xx. 19.



SO did our Lord greet His sad followers. The first of these salutations was addressed to the women as they hurried in the morning from the empty tomb bewildered; the second to the disciples assembled in the upper room in the evening of the same day. Both are ordinary greetings. The first is that usual in Greek, and literally means “Rejoice”; the second is that common in Hebrew. The divergence between the two may be owing to the Evangelist Matthew having rendered the words which our Lord actually did speak, in the tongue familiar to His time, into their equivalent Greek. But whatever account may be given of the divergence does not materially affect the significance which I find in the salutations. And I desire to turn to them for a few moments now, because I think that, if we

ponder them, we may gain some precious lessons from these Easter greetings of the Lord Himself.

I.—First, then, notice their strange and majestic simplicity.

He meets His followers after Calvary and the Tomb and the Resurrection, with the same words with which two casual acquaintances, after some slight absence, might salute one another by the way. Their very simplicity is their sublimity here. For think of what tremendous experiences He had passed through since they saw Him last, and of what a rush of rapture and disturbance of joy shook the minds of the disciples, and then estimate the calm and calming power of that matter-of-fact and simple greeting. It bears upon its very front the mark of truth. Would anybody have imagined the scene so? There have been one or two great poets who might conceivably have risen to the height of putting such words under such circumstances into the mouths of creatures of their own imagination. Analogous instances of the utmost simplicity of expression in moments of intense feeling may be quoted from *Æschylus* or *Shakespeare*, and are regarded as the high-water marks of genius. But does anyone suppose that these evangelists were exceptionally gifted souls of that sort, or that they could have imagined anything like this—so strange in its calm, so unnatural at first sight, and yet vindicating itself as so profoundly natural and sublime—unless for the simple reason that they had heard it themselves, or been told it by credible witnesses? Neither the delicate pencil of the great dramatic genius nor the coarser brush of legend can have drawn such an incident as this, and it seems to me that the only

reasonable explanation of it is that these greetings are what He really did say.

For, as I have remarked, unnatural as it seems at first sight, if we think for a moment, the very simplicity and calm, and, I was going to say, the *matter-of-factness*, of such a greeting, as the first that escaped from lips that had passed through death and yet were red and vocal, is congruous with the deepest truths of His nature. He has come from that tremendous conflict, and he reappears, not flushed with triumph, nor bearing any trace of effort, but surrounded as by a nimbus with that strange tranquillity which evermore enwrapped Him. So small does the awful scene which He has passed through seem to this Divine-human Man, and so utterly are the old ties and bonds unaffected by it, that when He meets His followers, all He has to say to them as His first greeting is, "Peace be unto you!"—the well-worn salutation that was bandied to and fro in every market-place and scene where men were wont to meet. Thus He indicates the Divine tranquillity of His nature; thus He minimises the fact of death; thus He reduces it to its true insignificance as a parenthesis across which may pass unaffected all sweet familiarities and loving friendships; thus He reknits the broken ties, and, though the form of their intercourse is hereafter to be profoundly modified, the substance of it remains, whereof He giveth assurance unto them in these His first words from the dead. So, as to a man standing on some mountain plateau, the deep gorges which seam it become invisible, and the unbroken level runs right on. So there are a marvellous proof of the majesty and tranquillity of the Divine

Man, a glorious manifestation of His superiority over death; a blessed assurance of the reknitting of all ancient ties, after it as before it, coming to us from pondering on the trivial words—trivial from other lips, but profoundly significant on His—where-with He greeted His servants when He rose again from the dead.

II.—Then note, secondly, the universal destination of the greetings of the risen Lord.

I have said that it is possibly a mere accident that we should have the two forms of salutation preserved for us here; and that it is quite conceivable that our Lord really spoke but one, which has been preserved unaltered from its Hebrew or Aramaic original in John, and rendered by its Greek equivalent by the Evangelist Matthew.

But, be that as it may, I cannot help feeling that in this fact, that the one salutation is the common greeting among Greek-speaking peoples, and the other the common greeting amongst Easterns, we may permissibly see the thought of the universal aspect of the gifts and greetings of the risen Christ. He comes to all men, and each man hears Him, “in his own tongue wherein he was born,” breathing forth to him greetings which are promises, and promises which are gifts. Just as the mocking trilingual inscription on the Cross proclaimed, in the language of religion and devotion, which was Hebrew; in the language of philosophy and poetry and art, which was Greek; and in the language of law and government, which was Latin, the one Kingdom of the crucified King; so in the greetings from the grave, the one declares that, to all the desires of

the eager, ardent, sensuous, joy-loving Westerns, and all the aspirations of the repose-loving Easterns, who had had bitter experience of the pangs and pains of a state of warfare, Jesus Christ is ready to respond and to bring answering gifts. Whatsoever any community or individual has conceived as its highest ideal of blessedness and of good, that the risen Christ hath in His hands to bestow. He takes men's ideals of blessedness, and deepens and purifies and refines them.

The Greek notion of joy, as the thing to be most wished for those dear to us, is but a shallow one. They had to learn, and their philosophy, and their poetry, and their art came to corruption because they would not learn, that the corn of wheat must be cast into the ground and die before it bring forth fruit. They knew little of the blessing and meaning of sorrow, and therefore the false glitter passed away, and the pursuit of the ideal became gross and foul and sensuous. And, on the other hand, the Jew, with his longing for peace, had an equally shallow and unworthy conception of what was meant, and what was needed to produce it. If he had only external concord with men, and a competency of outward good within his reach without too much trouble, he thought that because he "had much goods laid up for many years" he might "take his ease; and eat, and drink, and be merry." But Jesus Christ comes to satisfy both aspirations by contradicting both, and to reveal to each how much deeper and diviner was his desire than he dreamed it to be; and, therefore, how impossible it was to find the joy that would last, in the dancing fireflies of external satisfactions or the

delights of art and beauty; and how impossible it was to find the repose that ennobled and was wedded to action in anything short of union with God.

The Lord Christ comes out of the grave in which He lay for every man, and brings to each man's door, in a dialect intelligible to the man himself, the satisfaction of the single soul's aspirations and ideals, as well as of the national desires. His gifts and greetings are of universal destination, meant for us all and adapted for us each.

III.—Then, thirdly, notice the unfailing efficacy of the Lord's greetings.

Look at these people to whom He spoke. Remember what they were between the Friday and the Sunday morning; utterly cowed and beaten, the women, in accordance with the feminine nature, apparently more deeply touched by the personal loss of the Friend and Comforter; and the men apparently, whilst sharing that sorrow, also touched by despair at the going to water of all the hopes that they had been building upon His official character and position. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," they said, as they walked and were sad. They were on the point of parting. The Keystone withdrawn, the stones were ready to fall apart. Then came *something*—let us leave a blank for a moment—then came *something*; and those who had been cowards, dissolved in sorrow and relaxed by despair, in eight and forty hours became heroes. From that time, when, by all reasonable logic and common sense applied to men's motives, the Crucifixion should have crushed their dreams and dissolved their society, a precisely opposite effect ensues, and

not only did the Church continue, but the men changed their characters, and became, somehow or other, full of these very two things which Christ wishes them—namely, joy and peace.

Now I want to know—what bridges that gulf? How do you get the Peter of the Acts of the Apostles out of the Peter of the Gospels? Is there any way of explaining that revolution of character, whilst yet its broad outlines remain identical, which befell Him and all of them, except the old-fashioned one that the *something* which came in between was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of joy and peace in Him, a joy that no troubles or persecutions could shake, a peace that no conflicts could for a moment disturb? It seems to me that every theory of Christianity which boggles at accepting the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as a plain fact, is shattered to pieces on the sharp-pointed rock of this one demand—"Very well! If it is not a fact, account for the existence of the Church, and for the change in the characters of its members." You may wriggle as you like, but you will never get a reasonable theory of these two undeniable facts until you believe that He rose from the dead. In His right hand He carried peace, and in His left joy. He gave these to them, and therefore "out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens," and when the time came, "were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." There is omnipotent efficacy in Christ's greetings!

The one instance opens up the general law, that His wishes are gifts, that all His words are acts, that

He speaks and it is done, and when He desires for us joy, it is a deed of conveyance and gift, and invests us with the joy that He desires if we observe the conditions.

Christ's wishes are omnipotent, ours are powerless. We wish for our friends many good things, and the event turns them to mockery, and the garlands which we prepared for their birthdays have sometimes to be hung on their tombs. The limitations of human friendship and of our deepest and sincerest wishes, like a dark background, enhance the boundless efficacy of the greetings of the Master, which are not only wishes but bestowments of the thing wished, and therein given, by Him.

IV.—So, lastly, notice our share in this twofold greeting. When it was first heard, I suppose that the disciples and the women apprehended the salutation only in its most outward form, and that all other thoughts were lost in the mere rapture of the sudden change from the desolate sense of loss to the glad consciousness of renewed possession. When the women clung to His feet on that Easter morning they had no thought of anything but—"we clasp Thee again, O Soul of our souls."

But then, as time went on, the meaning and blessedness and far-reaching issues of the Resurrection became more plain to them. And I think we can see traces of the process, in the development of Christian teaching as presented in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. Peter in his early sermons dwells on the Resurrection all but exclusively from one point of view—viz., as being the great proof of Christ's Messiahship. Then there came by degrees,

as is represented in the same Peter's letter, and abundantly in the Apostle Paul's, the recognition of the light that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ threw upon immortality as a prophecy and a pattern thereof. Then, when the historical fact had become fully accepted and universally diffused, and its bearings upon men's future had been as fully apprehended as is possible here, there came, finally, the thought that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the symbol of the new life, which from that risen Lord passed into all those who loved and trusted Him.

Now, in all these three aspects—as proof of Messiahship, as the pattern and prophecy of immortality, and as the symbol of the better life which is accessible for us, here and now—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands for us even more truly than for the rapturous women who caught His feet, or for the thankful men who looked upon Him in the upper chamber, as the source of peace and of joy.

For, dear brethren, therein is set forth for us the Christ whose work is thereby declared to be finished and acceptable to God, and all sorrow of sin, all guilt, all disturbance of heart and mind by reason of evil passions and burning memories of former iniquity, and all disturbance of our concord with God, are at once and for ever swept away. If Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power by His Resurrection from the dead, and if in that Resurrection, as is most surely the case, the broad seal of the Divine acceptance is set to the charter of our forgiveness and sonship by the blood of the Cross, then joy and peace come to us from Him and from it.

Again, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ sets Him

forth before us as the pattern and the prophecy of immortal life. This Samson has taken the gates of the prison-house on His broad shoulders and carried them away, and now no man is kept imprisoned evermore in that darkness. The earthquake has opened the doors and loosened every man's bonds. Jesus Christ hath risen from the dead, and therein not only demonstrated the certainty that life subsists through death, and that a bodily life is possible thereafter, but sets before all those who give the keeping of their souls into His hands the glorious belief that the body of their humiliation shall be changed into the likeness of the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. Therefore the sorrows of death, for ourselves and for our dear ones, the agitation which it causes, and all the darkness into which we shrink from passing, are swept away when He comes forth from the grave, serene, radiant, and victorious, to die no more, but to dispense amongst us His peace and His joy.

And, again, the risen Christ is the source of a new life drawn from Him and received into the heart by faith in His sacrifice and Resurrection and glory. And if I have, deep-seated in my soul, though it may be in imperfect maturity, that life which is hid with Christ in God, an inward fountain of gladness, far beyond the effervescent, and therefore soon flat, waters of Greek or earthly joy, is mine; and in my inmost being dwells a depth of calm peace which no outward disturbance can touch, any more than the winds that rave along the surface of the ocean affect its unmoved and unsounded abysses. Jesus Christ

comes to thee, my brother, weary, distracted, care-laden, sin-laden, sorrowful, and fearful. And He says to each of us from the Throne what He said in the upper room before the Cross, and on leaving the grave after it, "My joy will remain in you, and your joy shall be full. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."



XXVIII.

The Servant=Master.

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God : He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.”—JOHN xiii. 3-5.



It has been suggested that the dispute as to “which was the greatest” which broke the sanctities of the upper chamber was connected with the unwillingness of each of the apostles to perform the menial office of washing the feet of his companions. They had come in from Bethany, and needed the service. But apparently it was omitted, and, although we can scarcely suppose that the transcendent act which is recorded in my text was performed at the beginning of the meal, yet I think we shall not be wrong if we see in it a reference to the neglected service.

The Evangelist who tells us of the dispute, and does not tell us of the foot-washing, preserves a sen-

tence which finds its true meaning only in this incident, "I am among you as He that serveth." And although John is the only recorder of this pathetic incident, there are allusions in other parts of Scripture which seem to hint at it. As, for instance, when Paul speaks of "taking upon Him the form of a servant"; and still more strikingly when Peter employs the remarkable word, which he does employ in his exhortation, "Be ye clothed with humility." For the word rendered there "clothed" occurs only in that one place in Scripture, and means literally the putting on of a slave's costume. One can scarcely help, then, seeing in these three passages to which I have referred echoes of this incident which John alone preserves to us. And so we get at once a hint of the harmony and of the incompleteness of the Gospel records.

I.—Consider the motives of this act.

Now, that is ground upon which the Evangelists very seldom enter. They tell us what Christ did, but very rarely do they give us any glimpses into why He did it. But this section of the Gospel is remarkable for its full and careful analysis of what Christ's impelling motives were in the final acts of His life. How did John find out why Christ did this deed? Perhaps he who had leaned upon His bosom at supper, and was evidently very closely associated with Him, may, in some unrecorded hour of intimate communion during the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, have heard from the Master the exposition of His motives. But more probably, I think, the long years of growing likeness to his Lord, and of meditation upon the depth of meaning in the

smallest events "that his faithful memory recalled, taught him to understand Christ's purpose and motives "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and the liker we get to our Master and the more we are filled with His Spirit, the more easy will it be for us to divine the purpose and the motives of His actions, whether as they are recorded in the Scripture or as they come to us in the experience of daily life.

But, passing that point, I desire for a moment to fix your attention on the two-fold key to our Lord's action which is given in this context. There is, first of all, in the first verse of the chapter, a general exposition of what was uppermost in His mind and heart during the whole of the period in the upper room. The act in our text, and the wonderful words which follow in the subsequent chapters, crowned by that great intercessory prayer, seem to me to be all explained for us by this first unveiling of His motives. "When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

And then the words of my text, which apply more specifically to the single incident with which they are brought into connection, tell us in addition why this one manifestation of Christ's love was given. "Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God." There, then, are two explanations of motive, the one covering a wider area than the other, but both converging on the incident before us.

The first of these is just this—the consciousness of

impending separation moved Christ to a more than ordinarily tender manifestation of His love. For the rendering which you will find in the margin of the Revised Version, "He loved them *to the uttermost*," seems to me to be truer to the Evangelist's meaning than the other, "He loved them unto the end." For it was more to John's purpose to tell us that the shadow of the Cross only brought to the surface in more blessed and wonderful representation the deep love of His heart, than simply to tell us that that shadow did not stop its flow. It is much to know that all through His sorrow He continued to love; it is far more to know that the sorrow sharpened its poignancy, and deepened its depth, and made more tender its tenderness.

How near to the man Christ that thought brings us! Do we not all know the impulse to make parting moments tender moments? The masks of use and wont drop off; the reticence which we, perhaps wisely, ordinarily cultivate in regard of our deepest feelings melts away. We yearn to condense all our unspoken love into some one word, act, look, or embrace, which it may afterwards be life to two hearts to remember. And Jesus Christ felt this. Because He was going away He could not but pour out Himself yet more completely than in the ordinary tenour of His life. The earthquake lays bare hidden veins of gold, and the heart opens itself out when separation impends. We shall never understand the works of Jesus Christ if we do as we are all apt to do, think of them only as having a didactic and doctrinal purpose. We must remember that there is in Him the true play of a human heart, and that it was to

relieve His own love, as well as to teach these men their duty, that He rose from the supper, and prepared Himself to wash the disciples' feet.

Then, on the other hand, the other motive which is brought by the Evangelists more immediately into connection with this incident is, "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God."

The consciousness of the highest dignity impels to the lowliest submission. "All things given into His hands," means universal and absolute dominion. "That He was come from God," means pre-existence, voluntary incarnation, an eternal Divine nature, and unbroken communion with the Father. "That He went to God," means a voluntary departure from this low world, and a return to "His own calm home, His habitation from eternity."

And, gathered all together, the phrases imply the absolute and unconditional consciousness of His Divine nature. It was that that sent Him with the towel round His loins to wash the foul feet of the pedestrians who had come by the dusty and hot way from Bethany, and through all the abominations of an Eastern city, unto the upper chamber.

This was He who from the beginning "was with God, and was God." This was He who was the Lord of Death, Victor over the grave. This was He who by His own power ascended up on high, and reigns on the Throne of the universe to-day. This was He whose breast the same Evangelist had seen before he wrote his Gospel, "girded with the golden girdle" of priesthood and of sovereignty; and holding, in the

hands that had laid the towel on the disciples' feet, the seven stars.

Oh! brethren, if we believed our creeds, how our hearts would melt with wonder and awe that He who was so high stooped so low! "Knowing that He came from God, and went to God," and that, even when He was kneeling there before these men, "the Father had given all things into His hands," what did He do? Triumph? Show His majesty? Flash His power? Demand service? "Girded Himself with a towel and washed His disciples' feet!"

The consciousness of loftiness does not alone avail to explain the transcendent lowliness. You need the former motive to be joined with it, because it is only love which bends loftiness to service, and makes the consciousness of superiority a yearning to divest one's self of the superiorities that separate, and to emphasise the emotions which unite.

II.—The detailed completeness of the act.

The remarkable particularity of the account of the stages of the humiliation suggests the eye-witness. John carried them all in his mind ineffaceably, and long, long years after that memorable hour we hear him recalling each detail of the scene. We can see the little group startled by the disturbance of the order of the meal as He rose from the table, and the hushed wonder and the open-lipped expectation with which they watched to see what the next step would be. He rises from the table and divests Himself of the upper garments which impeded movement. "What will He do next?" He takes the basin, standing there to be ready for washing the apostles' feet, but unused, and not even filled with water.

He fills it Himself, asking none to help Him. He girds the towel round Him; and then, perhaps, begins with the betrayer; at any rate, not with Peter.

Cannot you see them, as they look? Do not you feel the solemnity of the detailed particular account of each step?

And may we not also say it is a parable, or illustration, on a lower level, of the very same principles which were at work in the mightier fact of the greater condescension of His becoming flesh and dwelling among us?

He "rose from the table," as He rose from His place "in the bosom of the Father." He disturbed the meal as He broke the festivities of the heavens. He divested Himself of His garments, as He thought not equality with God a thing to be worn eagerly; and "He girded Himself with the towel," as He put on the weakness of flesh. Himself He filled the basin, by His own work providing the means of cleansing; and Himself applied the cleansing to the feet of those who were with Him. It is all a working out of the same double motive which drew Him downwards to our earth. The reason why He stooped, with His hands to wash the disciples' feet, is the same as the reason why He had hands to wash with—viz., that knowing Himself to be high over all, and loving all, He chose to become one with us, that we might become like unto Him. So the details of the act are a parable of His incarnation and death.

III.—And then, still further, note the purpose of the deed.

Now, although I have said that we never rightly

understand our Lord's actions if we are always looking for dogmatic or doctrinal purposes, and thinking of them rather as being lectures, and sometimes rebukes in act, than as being the outgush of His emotions and His Human-Divine nature, yet we have also to take into account their moral and spiritual lessons. His acts are words, and His words are acts. And, although the main and primary purpose of this incident, in so far as it had any other purpose than to relieve Christ's own love by manifesting itself, and to comfort the disciples' hearts by the tender manifestation, was to teach them their duty, as we shall presently see, yet the special aspect of cleansing which comes out so emphatically and prominently in the episode of Peter's refusal, is to be carried all along through the interpretation of the incident. This was the reason why Jesus Christ came from Heaven, and assumed flesh; and this was the reason why Jesus Christ, assuming flesh, bowed Himself to this menial office—to make men clean.

I venture to say that we never understand Jesus Christ and His work until we recognise it as its prominent purpose, to cleanse us from sin. An inadequate conception of what we need, shallow, superficial views of the gravity and universality and obstinacy of the fact of sin, are an impenetrable veil between men and all real understanding of Jesus Christ. There is no adequate motive for such an astounding fact as the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God, except the purpose of redeeming the world. If you do not believe that you—you individually, and all of us your brethren—need to be cleansed, you will find it hard to believe in the

divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ. If you have been down into the depths of your own heart, and found out what tremendous, diabolic power your own evil nature and sin have upon you, then you will not be content with anything less than the incarnate God who stoops from Heaven to bear the burden of your sin, and to take it all away. If you want to understand why He laid aside His garments, and took the servile form of our manhood, the appeal of man's sin to His love and the answer of His Divine condescension are the only explanation.

Again, let me remind you that there is no cleansing without Christ. Can you do it for yourselves, do you think? There is an old proverb, "One hand washes the other." That is true about stains on the flesh. It is not true about stains on our spirits. Nobody can do it for us but Jesus Christ alone. He kneels before us, having the right and the power to wash us because He has died for us. Kings of England used to touch for "the king's evil," and lay their pure fingers upon feculent masses of corruption. Our King's touch is sovereign for the corruption and incipient putrefaction of our sin; and there is no power in Heaven or earth that will make a man clean except the power of Jesus Christ. It is either Jesus Christ or filthiness.

If I might pass from my text for one moment, I would remind you of the episode which immediately follows, and suggest that if Jesus Christ is not cleansing us He is nothing to us. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in Me." I know, of course, that it is possible to have partial, rudimentary, and sometimes reverent conceptions of that Lord without

recognizing in Him the great "Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." But I am sure of this, that there is no real, living possession of Jesus Christ such as men's souls need, and such as will outlast the disintegrating influences of death, unless it be the possession of Him which appropriates for its own, primarily, His cleansing power. First of all He must cleanse, and then all other aspects of His glory, and gifts of His grace, will pour into our hearts.

No understanding of Christ, then, without the recognition that cleansing is the purpose and the vindication of His incarnation and sacrifice. No cleansing without Christ; no Christ worth calling by the name without cleansing.

IV.—And so, lastly, note the pattern in this act.

You will remember that it is followed by solemn words, spoken after He had taken His garments and resumed His place at the table, in which there blended, in the most wonderful fashion, the consciousness of authority, both as Teacher of truth and as Guide of life, and the sweetest and most loving lowliness. In them Jesus prescribed the wonderful act of His condescending love and cleansing power as the law of the Christian life. There are too many of us who profess to be quite willing to trust to Jesus Christ as the cleanser of our souls who are not nearly so willing to accept His example as the pattern for our lives; and I would have you note, as an extremely remarkable point, that all the New Testament references to our Lord as being our Example are given in immediate connection with His passion. The very part of His life which we generally regard as being most absolutely unique and inimitable is the fact in His life

which Apostles and Evangelists select as the one to set before us for our example.

Do you ask if any man can copy the sufferings of Jesus Christ? In regard of their virtue and efficacy, No. In regard of their motive—in one aspect, No; in another aspect, Yes. In regard of the spirit that impelled Him we may copy Him. The smallest trickle of water down a city gutter will carve out of the mud at its side little banks and cliffs, and exhibit all the phenomena of erosion on the largest scale, as the Mississippi does over half a continent, and the tiniest little wave in a basin will fall into the same curves as the billows of mid-ocean. You and I, in our little lives, may even aspire to “do *as* I have done to you.”

The true use of superiority is service. *Noblesse oblige!* Rank, wealth, capacity, talents, all things are given to us that we may use them to the last particle for our fellows. Only when the world and society have awakened to that great truth which the towel-girded, kneeling Christ has taught us, will society be organized on the principles that God meant.

But, further, the highest form of service is to cleanse. Cleansing is always dirty work for the cleaners, as every housemaid knows. You cannot make people clean by scolding them, by lecturing them, by patronizing them. You have to go down into the dirt if you mean to haul them out of it; and leave your smelling-bottles behind; and think nothing repulsive if your stooping to it may save a brother.

• The only way by which we can imitate that example

is by, first of all, participating in it for ourselves. We must, first of all, have the Cross as our trust before it can become our pattern and our law. We must, first, say, "Lord! not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." And then, in the measure in which we ourselves have received that cleansing benediction, we shall be impelled and able to lay our gentle hands on filth and leprosy; and to say to all the impure, "Jesus Christ, who hath cleansed *me*, makes *thee* clean."



Lamps and Bushels.

“ And Jesus said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? ”—
MARK iv. 21.



THE furniture of a very humble Eastern home is brought before us in this saying. In the original, each of the nouns has the definite article attached to it, and so suggests that in the house there was but one of each article; one lamp, a flat saucer with a wick swimming in oil; one measure for corn and the like; one bed, raised slightly, but sufficiently to admit of a flat vessel being put under it without danger, if for any reason it were desired to shade the light; and one lampstand.

The saying appeals to common sense. A man does not light a lamp and then smother it. The act of lighting implies the purpose of illumination, and, with everybody who acts logically, its sequel is to put the lamp on a stand, where it may be visible. All is part of the nightly routine of every Jewish household. Jesus had often watched it; and, commonplace as it is, it had mirrored to Him large truths. If our eyes were opened to the suggestions of common life, we

should find in them many parables and reminders of high matters.

Now this saying is a favourite and familiar one of our Lord's, occurring four times in the Gospels. It is interesting to notice that He, too, like other teachers, had His favourite maxims, which He turned round in all sorts of ways, and presented as reflecting light at different angles and suggesting different thoughts. The four occurrences of the saying are these. In my text, and in the parallel in Luke's Gospel, it is appended to the Parable of the Sower, and forms the basis of the exhortation, "Take heed how ye hear." In another place in Luke's Gospel it is appended to our Lord's words about "the sign of the prophet Jonah," which is explained to be the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it forms the basis of the exhortation to cultivate the single eye which is receptive of the light. In the Sermon on the Mount it is appended to the declaration that the disciples are the lights of the world, and forms the basis of the exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men." I have thought that it may be interesting and instructive if in this sermon we throw together these three applications of this one saying, and try to study the threefold lessons which it yields, and the weighty duties which it enforces.

I.—So, then, I have to ask you, first, to consider that we have a lesson as to the apparent obscurities of revelation and of our duty concerning them.

That is the connection in which the words occur in our text; and in the other place in Luke's Gospel, to which I have referred. Our Lord has just been speaking the Parable of the Sower. The disciples' curiosity

has been excited as to its significance. They ask Him for an explanation, which He gives minutely point by point. Then He passes to this general lesson of the purpose of the apparent veil which He had cast round the truth, by throwing it into a parabolic form. In effect He says: "If I had meant to hide My teaching by the form into which I cast it, I should have been acting as absurdly and contradictorily as a man would do who should light a lamp and immediately obscure it." True, there is the veil of parable, but the purpose of that relative concealment is not hiding, but revelation. "There is nothing covered but that it should be made known." The veil sharpens attention, stimulates curiosity, quickens effort, and so becomes positively subsidiary to the great purpose of revelation for which the parable is spoken. The existence of this veil of sensuous representation carries with it the obligation, "Take heed how ye hear."

Now all these thoughts have a far wider application than in reference to our Lord's parables. And I may suggest one or two of the thoughts that flow from the wider reference of the words before us.

"Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not under a candlestick?" There are no gratuitous and dark places in anything that God says to us. His revelation is absolutely clear. We may be sure of that if we consider the purpose for which He spoke at all. True, there are dark places; true, there are great gaps; true, we sometimes think, "Oh! it would have been so easy for Him to have said one word more; and the one word more would have been so infinitely

precious to bleeding hearts or wounded consciences or puzzled understandings." But "is a candle brought to be set under a bushel?" Do you think that if He took the trouble to light it He would immediately smother it, or arbitrarily conceal anything that the very fact of the revelation declares His intention to make known? His own great word remains true, "I have never spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth." If there be, as there are, obscurities, there are none there that would have been better away.

For the intention of all God's hiding—which hiding is an integral part of His revealing—is not to conceal, but to reveal. The best way sometimes of making a thing known to men is to veil it in some measure, in order that the very obscurity, like the morning mists, which prophesy a blazing sun in a clear sky by noonday, may demand search and quicken curiosity and spur to effort. He is not a wise teacher who makes things too easy. It is good that there should be difficulties; for difficulties are like the veins of quartz in the soil, which may turn the edge of the ploughshare or the spade, but prophesy that there is gold there for the man who comes with fitting tools. Wherever, in the broad land of God's word to us, there lie dark places, there are assurances of future illumination. God's hiding is in order to revelation, even as the prophet of old, when he was describing the great Theophany which flashed in light from the one side of the heaven to the other, exclaimed, "There was the hiding of His power."

He hides the purpose of His grace
To make it better known.

And the end of all the concealments, and apparent and real obscurities, that hang about His Word, is that for many of them patient and diligent attention and docile obedience should unfold them here, and for the rest, "the day shall declare them." The lamp is the light for the night-time, and it leaves many a corner in dark shadow; but, when "night's candles are burnt out, and day sits jocund on the misty mountain-tops," much will be plain that cannot be made plain now.

Therefore, for us the lesson from this assurance that God will not stultify Himself by giving to us a revelation that does not reveal, is, "Take heed how ye hear." The effort will not be in vain. Patient attention will ever be rewarded. The desire to learn will not be frustrated. In this school truth lightly won is truth loosely held; and only the attentive scholar is the receptive and retaining disciple. A great man once said, and said, too, presumptuously and proudly, that he had rather have the search after truth than truth. But yet there is a sense in which the saying may be modifiedly accepted; for, precious as is all the revelation of God, not the least precious effect that it is meant to produce upon us is the consciousness that in it there are unscaled heights above, and unplumbed depths beneath, and untraversed spaces all around us; and that for us that Word is like the pillar of cloud and fire that moved before Israel, blended light and darkness with the single office of guidance, and gleams ever before us to draw desires and feet after it. The lamp is set upon a stand. "Take heed how ye hear."

II.—Secondly, the saying, in another application

on our Lord's lips, gives us a lesson as to Himself and our attitude to Him.

I have already pointed out the other instance in Luke's Gospel in which this saying occurs, in the 11th chapter, where it is brought into immediate connection with our Lord's declaration that the sign to be given to His generation was "the sign of the prophet Jonah," which sign He explains as being reproduced in His own case, in His Resurrection. And then He adds the saying of our text, and immediately passes on to speak about the light in us which perceives the lamp, and the need of cultivating the single eye.

So, then, we have, in the figure thus applied, the thought that the earthly life of Jesus Christ necessarily implies a subsequent elevation from which He shines down upon all the world. God lit that lamp, and it is not going to be quenched in the darkness of the grave. He is not going to stultify Himself by sending the light of the world, and then letting the endless shades of death muffle and obscure it. But, just as the conclusion of the process which is begun in the kindling of the light is setting it on high on the stand, that it may beam over all the chamber, so the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, His exaltation to the supremacy from which He shall draw all men unto Him, is the necessary and, if I may so say, the logical result of the facts of His incarnation and death.

Then from this there follows what our Lord dwells upon at greater length. Having declared that the beginning of His course involved the completion of it in His exaltation to glory, He then goes on to say to

us, "You have an organ that corresponds to Me. I am the kindled lamp; you have the seeing eye." If the eye were not sunlike, says the great German thinker, how could it see the sun? If there were not in me that which corresponds to Jesus Christ, He would be no Light of the world, and no light to me. My reason, my affection, my conscience, my will, the whole of my spiritual being, answer to Him as the eye does to the light, and for everything that is in Christ there is in humanity something that is receptive, and that needs Him.

So, then, that being so, He being our light, just because He fits our needs, answers our desires, satisfies our cravings, fills the clefts of our hearts, and brings the response to all the questions of our understandings—that being the case, if the lamp is lit and blazing on the lampstand, and you and I have eyes to behold it, take heed that you cultivate the single eye which apprehends Christ. Concentration of purpose, simplicity and sincerity of aim, a heart centred upon Him, a mind drawn to contemplate unfalteringly and without distraction of crosslights His beauty, His supremacy, His completeness, and a soul utterly devoted to Him—these are the conditions to which that light will ever manifest itself, and illumine the whole man. But if we come with divided hearts, with distracted aims, giving Him fragments of ourselves, and seeking Him by spasms and at intervals, and having a dozen other deities in our pantheon, beside the calm form of the Christ of Nazareth, what wonder is there that we see in Him "no beauty that we should desire Him"? "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Oh! if that were our

prayer, and if the effort to secure that were honestly the effort of our lives, all His loveliness, His sweetness, His adaptation to our whole being would manifest itself to us. The eye must be single, directed to Him, if the heart is to rejoice in His light.

I need not do more than remind you of the blessed consequence which our Lord represents as flowing from this union of the seeing heart and the revealing light—viz., “Thy whole body shall be full of light.” In every eye that beholds the flame of the lamp there is a little lamp-flame mirrored and manifested. And just as what we see makes its image on the seeing organ of the body, so the Christ beheld is a Christ embodied in us; and we, gazing upon Him, are “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.” Light that remains without us does not illuminate; light that passes into us is the light by which we see, and the Christ beheld is the Christ ensphered in our hearts.

III.—So, lastly, this great saying gives us a lesson as to the duties of Christian men as lights in the world.

I pointed out that another instance of the occurrence of the saying is in the Sermon on the Mount, where it is transferred from the revelation of God in His Word, and in His incarnate Word, to the relation of Christian men to the world in which they dwell. I need not remind you how frequently that same metaphor occurs in Scripture; how in the early Jewish ritual the great seven-branched lampstand which stood at first in the Tabernacle was the emblem of Israel's office in the whole world, as it rayed out its light

through the curtains of the Tabernacle into the darkness of the desert. Nor need I remind you how our Lord bare witness to His forerunner by the praise that "He was a burning and a shining light," nor how He commanded His disciples to have their "loins girt and their lamps burning," nor how He spoke the Parable of the Ten Virgins with their lamps.

From all these there follows the same general thought that Christian men, not so much by specific effort, nor by words, nor by definite proclamation, as by the raying out from them in life and conduct of a Christlike spirit, are set for the illumination of the world. The bearing of our text in reference to that subject is just this—our obligation as Christians to show forth the glories of Him who hath "called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" is rested upon His very purpose in drawing us to Himself, and receiving us into the number of His people. If God in Christ, by communicating to us the light and the knowledge of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, has made us lights of the world, it is not done in order that the light may be smothered incontinently, but His act of lighting indicates His purpose of illumination. What are you a Christian for? That you may go to heaven? Certainly! That your sins may be forgiven? No doubt! But is that the only end? Are you such a very great being as that your happiness and well-being can legitimately be the ultimate purpose of God's dealings with you? Are you so isolated from all mankind as that anything which He does for you is to be treated by you as a morsel that you can take into your corner and devour, like a grudging dog, to yourselves? By no means. "God,

who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts in order that "we might impart the light to others. Or, as Shakespeare has it, in words perhaps suggested by the Scripture metaphor,

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light us for ourselves.

He gave you His Son that you may give the Gospel to others, and you stultify His purpose in your salvation unless you become ministers of His grace and manifestors of His light.

Then take from this emblem, too, a homely suggestion as to the hindrances that stand in the way of our fulfilling the Divine intention in our salvation. It is, perhaps, a piece of fancy, but still it may point a lesson. The lamp is not hid "under a bushel." That is the emblem of commerce or business, and is meant for the measurement of material wealth and sustenance. "Under a bed"—the place where people take their ease and repose. These two loves—the undue love of the bushel and the corn that is in it, and the undue love of the bed and the leisurely ease that you may get there—are large factors in preventing Christian men from fulfilling God's purpose in their salvation.

Then take a hint as to the means by which such a purpose can be fulfilled by Christian souls. They are suggested in the two of the other uses of the emblem by our Lord Himself. The first is when He said, "Let your loins be girded"—they are not when you are in bed—"and your lamps burning." Your light will not shine in a naughty world without your strenuous effort, and ungirt loins will very shortly

lead to extinguished lamps. The other means to this manifestation of visible Christlikeness lies in that tragical story of the foolish virgins who took no oil in their vessels. If light express the outward Christian life, the oil, in accordance with the whole tenour of Scripture symbolism, expresses the inward gift of the Divine Spirit. And where that gift is neglected, where it is not earnestly sought and carefully treasured, there may be a kind of smoky illuminations, which, in the dark, may pass for bright lights, but, when the Lord comes, shudder into extinction, and, to the astonishment of the witless five who carried them, are found to be "going out." Brethren, only He who does not quench the smoking flax, but tends it to a flame, will help us to keep our lamps bright.

First of all, then, let us gaze upon the light in Him, until we become light in the Lord. And then let us see to it, by girt loins and continual reception of the illuminating principle of the Divine Spirit's oil, that we fill our lamps with "deeds of odorous light, and hopes that breed not shame." Then, "when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends, passes to bliss on the mid-hour of night," we shall have "gained our entrance" among the "virgins wise and pure."

“The Follies of the Wise.”

“The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.”—LUKE xvi. 8.



THE parable of which these words are the close is remarkable in that it proposes a piece of deliberate roguery as, in some sort, a pattern for Christian people. The steward's conduct was neither more nor less than rascality. And yet, says Christ, “Do like that !”

The explanation is to be found mainly in the consideration that what was faithless sacrifice of his master's interests, on the part of the steward, is, in regard to the Christian man's use of earthly gifts, the right employment of the possessions which have been entrusted to him. But there is another vindication of the singular selection of such conduct as an example, in the consideration that what is praised is not the dishonesty, but the foresight, realization of the facts of the case, promptitude, wisdom of various kinds exhibited by the steward. And so says our Lord—shutting out the consideration of ends, and looking only for a moment at means—the world can teach

the Church a great many lessons; and it would be well for the Church if its members lived in the fashion in which the men of the world do. There is eulogium here, a recognition of splendid qualities, prostituted to low purposes; a recognition of wisdom in the adaptation of means to an end; and a limitation of the recognition, because it is only "*in their generation*" that "the children of this world are wiser than the children of light."

I.—So we may look, first, at these two classes, which our Lord opposes here to one another.

"The children of the world" would have, for their natural antithesis, the children of another world. The "children of light" would have, for their natural antithesis, "the children of darkness." But our Lord so orders His words as to suggest a double antithesis, one member of which has to be supplied in each case, and He would teach us that whoever the children of this world may be, they are "children of darkness"; and that the "children of light" are so, just because they are the children of another world than this. Thus He limits His praise, because it is the sons of darkness that, in a certain sense, are wiser than the enlightened ones. And that is what makes the wonder and the inconsistency to which our Lord is pointing. We can understand a man being a consistent, thorough-paced fool all through. But men whose folly is so dashed and streaked with wisdom, and others whose wisdom is so spotted and blurred with folly, are the extraordinary paradoxes which experience of life presents to us.

The children of this world are of darkness; the children of light are the children of another world. Now

I need not spend more than a sentence or two in further explaining these two antitheses. I do not intend to vindicate them, or to vindicate our Lord's distinct classification of men into these two halves. What does He mean by the children of this world? The old Hebrew idiom, the children of so-and-so, simply suggests persons who are so fully possessed and saturated with a given quality, or who belong so entirely to a given person, as that they are spoken of as if they stood to it, or to him, in the relation of children to their parents. And a child of this world is a man whose whole thoughts, aims, and objects of life are limited and conditioned by this material present. But the word which is employed here, translated rightly enough “world,” is not the same as that which is often used, especially in John's writings, for the same idea. Although it conveys a similar idea, still it is different. The characteristic quality of the visible and material world which is set forth by the expression here employed is its transiency. “The children of this epoch” rather than “of this world” is the meaning of the phrase. And it suggests, not so much the inadequacy of the material to satisfy the spiritual, as the absurdity of a man fixing his hopes and limiting his aims and life-purpose within the bounds of what is destined to fade and perish. Fleeting wealth, fleeting honours, mortal loves, wisdom, and studies that pass away with the passing away of the material; these, however elevating some of them may be, however sweet some of them may be, however needful all of them are in their places, are not the things to which a man can safely lash his being, or entrust his happiness, or

wisely devote his life. And therefore the men who, ignoring the fact that they live and the world passes, make themselves its slaves, and itself their object, are convicted by the very fact of the disproportion between the duration of themselves and of that which is their aim, of being children of the darkness.

Then we come to the other antithesis. The children of light are so in the measure in which their lives are not dependent exclusively upon, nor directed solely towards, the present order and condition of things. If there be a *this*, then there is a *that*. If there be an age which is qualified as being present, then that implies that there is an age or epoch which is yet to come. And that coming "age" should regulate the whole of our relations to that age which at present is. For life is continuous, and the coming epoch is the outcome of the present. As truly as "the child is father of the man," so truly is Eternity the offspring of Time, and that which we are to-day determines that which we shall be through the ages. He that recognizes the relations of the present and the future, who sees the small, limited things of the moment running out into the dim eternity beyond, and the track unbroken across the gulfs of death and the broad expanse of countless years, and who therefore orders the little things here so as to secure the great things yonder, he, and, only he, who has made time the lackey to eternity, and in his pursuit of the things seen and temporal, regards them always in the light of things [unseen and eternal, is a child of light.

II.—The second consideration suggested here is the limited and relative wisdom of the fools.

The children of this world, who are the children of darkness, and who at bottom are thoroughly unwise, considered relatively, “are wiser than the children of light.” The steward is the example. “A rogue is always”—as one of our thinkers puts it—“a round-about fool.” He would have been a much wiser man if he had been an honest one; and, instead of tampering with his lord’s goods, had faithfully administered them.

But, shutting out the consideration of the moral quality of his action, look how much there was in it that was wise, prudent, and worthy of praise. There were courage, fertility of resource, a clear insight into what was the right thing to do. There was a wise adaptation of means to an end. There was promptitude in carrying out the wise means that suggested themselves to him. The design was bad. Granted. We are not talking about goodness, but about cleverness. So, very significantly, in the parable the person cheated cannot help saying that the cheat was a clever one. The “lord,” although he had suffered by it, “commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.”

Did you never know in Manchester some piece of sharp practice, about which people said, “Ah, well, he is a clever fellow”; and all but condoned the immorality for the sake of the smartness? The lord and the steward belong to the same level of character; and vulpine sagacity, astuteness, and qualities which ensure success in material things seem to both of them to be of the highest value. “The children of this world, *in their generation*”—but only in it—“are wiser than the children of light.”

Now I draw a very simple, practical lesson, and it is just this, that if Christian men, in their Christian lives, would practise the virtues that the world practises, in pursuit of its shabby aims and ends, their whole Christian character would be revolutionized. Why, a boy will spend more pains in learning to whistle than half of you do in trying to cultivate your Christian character. The secret of success religiously is precisely the same as the secret of success in ordinary things. Look at the splendid qualities that go to the making of a successful housebreaker. Audacity, resource, secrecy, promptitude, persistence, skill of hand, and a hundred others, are put into play before a man can break into your back kitchen and steal your goods. Look at the qualities that go to the making of a successful amuser of people. Men will spend endless time and pains, and devote concentration, persistence, self-denial, diligence, to learning how to play upon some instrument, how to swing upon a trapeze, how to twist themselves into abnormal contortions. Jugglers and fiddlers, and circus-riders and dancers, and people of that sort, spend far more time upon efforts to perfect themselves in their profession than ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians do to make themselves true followers of Jesus Christ. They know that nothing is to be got without working for it, and there is nothing to be got in the Christian life without working for it any more than in any other.

Shut out the end for a moment, and look at the means. From the ranks of criminals, of amusers, and of the purely worldly men of business that you come in contact with every day, we may get lessons

that ought to bring a blush to all our cheeks, when we think to ourselves how a wealth of intellectual and moral qualities and virtues, such as we do not bring to bear on our Christian lives, are by these men employed in regard of their infinitely smaller pursuits.

Oh! brethren, we ought to be our own rebukes, for it is not only other people who show forth in other fields of life the virtues that would make so far better Christians of us, if we used them in ours, but that we ourselves carry within ourselves the condemning contrast. Look at your daily life! Do you give anything like the effort to grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that you do to make or maintain your position in the world? When you are working side by side with the children of this world for the same objects, you keep step with them, and are known to be diligent in business as they are. When you pass into the church, what do you do there? Are we not ice in one half of our lives, and fire in the other? We may well lay to heart these solemn words of our Lord, and take shame when we think that not only do the unwise, who choose the world as their portion, put us to shame in their self-denial, their earnestness, their absorption, their clear insight into facts, their swiftness in availing themselves of every opportunity, their persistence and their perseverance, but that we rebuke ourselves because of the difference between the earnestness with which we follow the things that are of this world, and the languor of our pursuit after the things that are unseen and eternal.

Of course the reasons for the contrast are easy

enough to apprehend, and I do not need to spend time upon them. The objects that so have power to stimulate and to lash men into energy, continuously through their lives, lie at hand, and a candle near will dim the sunshine beyond. These objects appeal to sense, and such make a deeper impression than things that are shown to the mind, as every picture-book may prove to us. And we, in regard of the aims of our Christian life, have to make a continual effort to bring and keep them before us, or they are crowded out by the intrusive vulgarities and dazzling brilliances of the present. And so it comes to pass that the men who hunt after trifles that are to perish set examples to the men who say that they are pursuing eternal realities. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." Go to the men of the world, thou Christian, and do not let it be said that the devil's scholars are more studious and earnest than Christ's disciples.

III.—Lastly, note the conclusive folly of the partially wise.

"In their generation," says Christ; and that is all that can be said. The circle runs round its 360 degrees, and these people take a segment of it, say forty-five degrees, and all the rest is as non-existent. If I am to call a man a wise man out and out, there are two things that I shall have to be satisfied about concerning him. The one is, what is he aiming at? and the other, how does he aim at it? In regard of the means, the men of the world bear the bell, and carry away the supremacy. Let in the thought of the end, and things change. Two questions reduce all the world's wisdom to stark, staring insanity. The

first question is, What are you doing it for? And the second question is, And suppose you get it, what then? Nothing that cannot pass the barrier of these two questions satisfactorily is other than madness, if taken to be the aim of a man's life. You have to look at the end, and the whole circumference of the circle of the human being, before you serve out the epithets of "wise" and "foolish."

I need not dwell on the manifest folly of men who give their lives to aims and ends of which I have already said that they are disproportioned to the capacity of the pursuer. Look at yourselves, brothers; these hearts of yours that need an infinite love for their satisfaction, these active spirits of yours that can never be at rest in creatural perfection; these troubled consciences of yours that stir and moan inarticulately over unperceived wounds until they are healed by Christ. How can any man with a heart and a will, and a progressive spirit and intellect, find what he needs in anything beneath the stars? "Whose image and superscription hath it? They say unto Him, Cæsar's"; we say, "God's." "Render unto God the things that are God's." The man who makes anything but God his end and aim is relatively wise and absolutely foolish.

Let me remind you, too, that the same sentence of folly passes, if we consider the disproportion between the duration of the objects and of Him who makes them His aim. You live, and if you are a wise man, your treasures will be of the kind that last as long as you. "They call their lands after their own name; they think that their houses shall continue for ever. They go down into the dust. Their glory shall not

descend after them," and, therefore, "this, their way, is their folly."

Brethren, all that I would say may be gathered into two words. Let there be a proportion between your aims and your capacity. That signifies, let God be your end. And let there be a correspondence between your end and your means. That signifies, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Or else, when everything comes to be squared up and settled, the epitaph on your gravestone will deservedly be: "Thou fool!"



XXXI.

The Hope of the Calling.

“That ye may know what is the hope of His calling.”—
EPHESIANS i. 18.



MAN'S prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. What he asks for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and how he asks it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul's writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire than in his petitions for his friends.

In that great prayer of which my text forms a part we have his response to the good news that had reached him of the steadfastness in faith and abundance in love of these Ephesian Christians. As the best expression of his glad love he asks for them the knowledge of three things, of which my text is the first, and the other two are the “riches of the glory

of the inheritance" and "the exceeding greatness of God's power."

Now if we take the "hope" in my text, as is often done, as meaning the thing hoped for, there seems to be but a shadowy difference between the first and the second of these subjects of the apostolic petition. Whereas, if we take it as meaning, not the object on which the emotion is fixed, but the emotion itself, then all the three stand in a natural gradation and connection. We have, first, the Christian emotion; then the object upon which it is fixed; "the glory of the inheritance"; then the power by which the latter is brought and the former is realized. We shall consider the second and third of these petitions in the following sermons. For the present I confine myself to this first, the Apostle's great desire for Christians who had already made considerable progress in the Christian life, "that they may know," by experiencing it, "what is the hope of His calling."

I.—Now the first thought that these words suggest to me is this, that the Christian hope is based upon the facts of Christian experience.

What does the Apostle mean by naming it "the hope of his calling"? He means this, that the great act of the Divine mercy revealed to us in the Gospel, by which God summons and invites men to Himself, will naturally produce in those who have yielded to it a hope of immortal and perfect life. Because God has called men, therefore the man who has yielded to the call may legitimately, and must, if he is to do his duty, cherish such a hope. It is clear enough that this is so, inasmuch as, unless there be a heaven of completeness for us who have yielded to the summons and

obeyed the invitation of God in His Gospel, His whole procedure is enigmatical and bewildering. The fact of the call is inexplicable; the cost of it is no less so. It was not worth while for God to make the world unless with respect to another which was to follow. It is still less worth His while to redeem the world if the results of that redemption, as they are exhibited here and now, and as they are capable of being exhibited in this present condition of things, are all that are to flow from it. It was not worth Christ's while to die, it was not worth God's while to send His Son, there was no sense or consistency in that great voice that echoes from heaven, calling us to love and serve Him, unless, beyond the jangling contradictions, and imperfect attainments, and foiled aspirations, and fragmentary faith, and broken services of earth, there be a region of completeness, where all that was tendency here shall have become effect; and all that was but in germ here, and sorely frostbitten by the ungenial climate, and shrivelled by the foul vapours in the atmosphere, shall blossom and burgeon into eternal life. The Christian life, as it is to-day, in its attainments and imperfections, is at once the witness of the reality of the power that has produced it, and clamantly calls for a sphere and environment in which that power shall be able to produce the effects which it is capable of producing.

God is "not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of man that He should repent." Men begin grand designs which never get further than the paper that they are drawn on; or they build a porch, and then they are bankrupt, or change their minds, or die, and the palace remains unrealised, and all that pass by

mock and say, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." But God's designs are certain of accomplishment. Unless we are to be reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion, and forego our belief in His veracity and resources to execute His designs, the design that lies in the calling must needs lead on to the realm of perfectness. If we consider the agent by which it is effected, even the risen Christ; if we consider the cost at which it was accomplished, even the death on the Cross, the mission of His Son, and His assumption of the limitations of an incarnate life; if we consider the manifest potencies of the power that He has brought into operation in the present Christian life; and if we consider, side by side with these, the stark, staring contradictions and as manifest inevitable limitations of the effects of that power, His calling carries in its depths the assurance that what He means shall be done, that Jesus Christ has not died in vain, that He has not ascended to fill a solitary throne, but is the Firstfruits of a great harvest; and that we shall one day be all that it is in the gospel of our salvation to make us, unhindered by the limitations and unthwarted by the antagonisms of this poor human life of ours. Unless there be a heaven in which all desires shall be satisfied, all evils removed, all good perfected, all ragged trees made symmetrical and full-grown, and all souls that love Him radiant with His own perfect image then the light that seemed a light from heaven is the most delusive of all the marsh-fires of earth, and nothing in the illusions of sense or of men's cunning is so cruel or so tragic as the calling that seemed to

be the voice of God, and summoned us to a heaven which was only a dream.

II.—And so, secondly, notice how this hope of our text is in some sense the very topstone of the Christian life.

Paul has heard concerning these people in Ephesus, of their faith and love. And because he has heard of these, therefore he brings this prayer. These two, the faith which apprehends the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and the love which that faith produces in the heart that accepts the revelation of the infinite love, are crowned by, and are imperfect without, and naturally lead on to, the brightness of this great hope. Faith—the reliance of the spirit upon the veracity of the revealing God—gives hope its contents; for the Christian hope is not spun out of our own imaginations, nor is it the mere making objective in a future life of the unfulfilled desires of this disappointing present, but it is the recognition by the trusting spirit of the great and starry truths that are flashed upon it by the Word of God. Faith draws back the curtain, and Hope gazes into the supernal abysses. My hope, if it be anything else than the veriest will-o'-the-wisp and delusion, is the answer of my heart to the revealed truth of God.

Similarly the love which flows from faith not only necessarily leads on to the expectation of union being perfected with the object of its warm affection, but also so works upon the heart and character as that the false and seducing loves which draw away, like some sluice upon a river, the 'current of life from its true channel, are all sanctified and no more hinder hope. Loving, we hope for that which, unless we

loved, would not draw desires nor yield foretastes of sweetness which, like perfumed oil, feed the pure flame of hope.

The triad of Christian graces is completed by Hope. Without her fair presence something is wanting to the completeness of her elder sisters. The great Campanile at Florence, though it be inlaid with glowing marbles and fair sculptures, and perfect in its beauty, wants the gilded skyward-pointing pinnacle of its topmost pyramid; and so it stands incomplete. And thus faith and love need for their crowning and completion the topmost grace that looks up to the sky and is sure of a mansion there.

Brethren, our Christianity is woefully imperfect unless faith and love find their acme, their outstretching completion, in this Christian hope. Do you seek to complete your faith and love by a living hope full of immortality?

III.—Thirdly, notice how this hope is an all-important element in the Christian life.

The Apostle asks for it as the best thing that can befall these Ephesian Christians, as the one thing that they need to make them strong and good and blessed. There are many other aspects of desire for them which appear in other parts of this letter. But here all Christian progress is regarded as being held in solution and included in vigorous hope.

Why is the activity of hope thus important for Christian life? Because it stimulates effort, calms sorrows, takes the fascination out of temptations, supplies a new aim for life and a new measure for the things of time and sense.

If we lived, as we ought to live, in the habitual

apprehension of the great future awaiting all real Christians, would it not change the whole aspect of life? The world is very big when it is looked at from any point upon its surface; but suppose it could be looked at from the central sun, how large would it appear then? We can shift our station in like fashion, and then we get the true measure at once of the insignificance and of the greatness of life. This world means nothing worthy, except as an introduction to another. Not that thereby there will follow in any wise man contempt for the present, for the very same reference to the future which dwarfs the greatnesses and dwindles the sorrows, and almost extinguishes the dazzling lights of this present, does also lift it to its true significance and importance. It is the vestibule of that future, and that future is conditioned throughout by the results of the few years that we live here. An apprenticeship may be a very poor matter, looked at in itself; and the boy may say What is the use of my working at all these trivial things? but, since it is apprenticeship, it is worth while to attend to every trifle in its course, for attention to them will affect the standing of the man all his days.

Here and now we are getting ready for the great workshop yonder; learning the trick of the tools, and how to use our fingers and our powers, and, when the schooling is done, we shall be set to nobler work, and receive ample wages for the years here. Because that great "to-morrow will be as this day" of earthly life, "and much more abundant," therefore it is no trifle to work amongst the trifles; and nothing is small which may tell on our condition yonder. The least deflec-

tion from the straight line, however acute may be the angle which the divergent lines enclose at the starting, and however small may seem to be the deviation from parallelism, will, if prolonged to infinity, have room between the two for all the stars, and the distance between them will be that the one is in heaven and the other is in hell. And so it is a great thing to live amongst the little things, and life gains its true significance when we dwarf and magnify it by linking it with the world to come.

If we only kept that hope bright before us, how little discomforts and sorrows and troubles would matter! Life would become "a solemn scorn of ills." It does not matter much what kind of cabin accommodation we have if we are only going a short voyage; the main thing is to make the port. If we, as Christian people, cherish, as we ought to do, this great hope, then we shall be able to control, and *not* to despise but to exalt this fleeting and transient scene, because it is linked inseparably with the life that is to come.

IV.—Lastly, this hope needs enlightened eyes.

The Apostle prays that God may give to these Ephesians "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," and then he adds, as the result of that gift, the desire that the Ephesian believers may have "the eyes of their hearts enlightened." That is a remarkable expression. It does not mean, as an English reader might suppose it to mean, that the affections are the agents by which this knowledge reaches us; but "heart" is here used, as it often is in Scripture, as a general expression for the whole inward life, and all that the Apostle means is that, by

the gift of the Divine Spirit of wisdom, a man's inner nature may be so touched as to be capable of perceiving and grasping the "hope of the calling."

Observe, too, the language, "that ye may know the hope." How can you *know* a hope? How do you know any kind of feeling? By having it. The only way of knowing what is the hope is to hope, and this is only possible by dint of these eyes of the understanding being enlightened. For our inward nature, as we have it, and as we use it, without the touch of that Divine Spirit, is so engrossed with this present that the far-off blessedness to which my text refers has no chance of entering there. No man can look at something beside him with one eye, and at something half a mile off with the other. You have to focus the eye according to the object; and he that is gazing upon the near is thereby made blind to that which is afar off. If we go crawling along the low levels with our eyes upon the dust, then of course we cannot see the crown above.

We need more than the historical revelation of the light in order to enlighten the inward nature. There is many a man here now who knows all about the immortality that is brought to light by Jesus Christ just as well as the Christian man whose soul is full of the hope of it, and who yet, for all his knowledge does not know the hope, because he has not felt it. You have to get further than to the acceptance intellectually of the historical facts of a risen and ascended Saviour before there can be, in your heart, any vital hope of immortality. The inward eye must be cleared and strengthened, cross lights must be shut out so that we may direct the single eye of our

hearts towards the great objects which alone are worthy of its fixed contemplation. And we cannot do that without a Divine help, that Spirit of wisdom which will fill our hearts if we ask for it, which will fix our affections, which will clear our eyesight, which will withdraw it from seeing vanity as well as give it reality to see.

But we must observe the conditions. Since this clearness of hope comes not merely from the acceptance as a truth of the fact of Christ's resurrection and ascension, but comes through the gift of that Divine Spirit, then to have it you must ask for it. Christian people, do you ask for it? Do you ever pray—I do not mean in words, but in real desire—that God would help you to keep steadily before you that great future to which we are all going so fast? If you do you will get the answer. Seek for that Spirit; use it, and do not resist its touches. Do not fix your gaze on the world when God is trying to draw you to fix it upon Himself. Think more about Jesus Christ, more about God's high calling, live nearer to Him, and try more honestly, more earnestly, more prayerfully, more habitually, even amidst all the troubles and difficulties and trivialities of each day, to cultivate that great faculty of joyful and assured hope.

Surely God did not endue us with the power of hoping that we might fling it all away on trivial, transient things. We are all far too short-sighted; our fault is not that we do not hope, but that we hope for such near things, for such small things, like the old mariners who had no compass nor sextant, and were obliged to creep timidly along the coasts, and steer from headland to headland. But we ought to

launch boldly out into mid-ocean, knowing that we have before us that star that cannot guide us amiss. Do not set your hopes on the things that perish, for if you do, hopes fulfilled and hopes disappointed will be equally bitter in your mouths. And you older people who, like myself, are drawing near the end of your days, and have little else left to hope for in this world, do you see to it that your anticipations extend "above the ruinable skies."

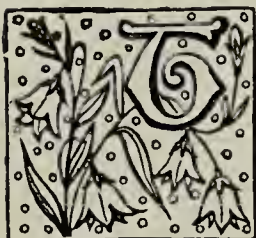
There is an object beyond experience, above imagination, without example, for which the creation wants a comparison, we an apprehension, and the Word of God itself a sufficient revelation. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God hath called us to His eternal kingdom and glory. Let us seek to walk in the light of the "hope of His calling."



XXXII.

God's Inheritance in the Saints.

“That ye may know what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”—EPH. i. 18.



THE misery of Hope is that it so often owes its materials to the strength of our desires or to the activity of our imagination. But when mere wishes or fancies spin the thread, Hope cannot weave a lasting fabric. And so one of the old prophets, in speaking of the delusive hopes of man, says that they are like “spiders’ webs,” and “shall not become garments.” Paul, then, having been asking for these Ephesian Christians that they might have hopes lofty and worthy, and such as God’s summons to them would inspire, passes on to ask that they might have the material out of which they could weave such hope, namely, a sure and clear knowledge of the future blessings. The language in which he describes that future is remarkable—“the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” He calls it God’s inheritance, not as meaning that God is the Inheritor, but the Giver. He speaks of it as “in the saints,” meaning that, just as the land of Canaan was distributed

amongst tribes and families, and each man got his own little plot, so that broad land is parted out amongst those who are "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

And so my text suggests to me three points to which I seek to call your attention. First, the inheritance ; second, the heirs ; and third, the heirs' present knowledge of their future possession.

I.—First, then, note the inheritance.

Now we must discharge from the word some of its ordinary associations. There is no reference to the thought of succession in it, as the mere English reader is accustomed to think—to whom inheritance means possession by the death of another. The idea is simply that of possession. The figure which underlies the word is, of course, that of the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, but we must go a great deal deeper than that in order to understand its whole sweep and fulness of meaning.

What is the portion for a soul? God. God is Heaven, and Heaven is God. No interpretation of "the inheritance," however it may run into cheap and vulgar sensuous descriptions of a future glory, has come within sight of the meaning of the word, unless it has grasped this as the central thought: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Only God can be the portion of a human spirit. And none else can fill the narrowest and the smallest of man's needs.

So, then, if there were realized all the accumulated changes of progress in blessedness, and the withdrawal of all external causes of disquiet and weariness and weeping, still the heart would hunger and be empty

of its true possession unless God Himself had flowed into it. It were but a poor advancement and the gain of a loss, if yearnings were made immortal, and the aching vacuity, which haunts every soul that is parted from God were cursed with immortality. It would be so, if it be not true that the inheritance is nothing less than the fuller possession of God Himself.

And how do men possess God? How do we possess one another, here and now? By precisely the same way, only indefinitely expanded and exalted, do we possess Him here, and shall we possess Him hereafter. Heart to heart is joined by love which is mutual and interpenetrating possession; where "mine" and "thine" become blended, like the several portions of the one ray of white light, in the blessed word "ours." Contemplation makes us possessors of God. Assimilation to His character makes us own and have Him. They who love and gaze, and are being changed by still degrees into His likeness, possess Him. This is the central idea of man's future destiny and highest blessedness, a union with God closer and more intimate in degree, but yet essentially the same in kind, as is here possible amidst the shows and vanities and wearinesses of this mortal life. "His servants shall serve Him, and see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." Obedience, contemplation, transformation, these are the hands by which we here lay hold on God; and they in the heavens grasp Him just as we here on earth may do. The "inheritance" is God Himself.

Surely that is in accordance with the whole teaching of Scripture, and is but the expansion of plain words

which tell us that we "are heirs of God." If that be so, then all the other subsidiary blessings which have been, to the sore detriment of Christian anticipation and of Christian life in a hundred ways, elevated into disproportionate importance, fall into their right places, and are more when they are looked upon as secondary than when they are looked upon as primary.

Ah! brethren, neither the sensuous metaphors which, in accommodation to our weakness, Scripture has used to paint that future so that we may, in some measure, comprehend it, nor the translation of these, in so far as they refer to circumstances and externals, are enough for us. It is blessed to know that "there shall be no night there"—blessed to grasp all those sweet negatives which contradict the miseries of the world, and to think of no sin, no curse, no tears, no sighing nor sorrow, neither any more pain, "because the former things have passed away." It is sweet and ennobling to think that, when we are discharged of the load of this cumbrous flesh, we shall be much more ourselves, and able to see where now is but darkness, and to feel where now is but vacancy. It is blessed to think of the recognizing of lost and loved ones. But all these blessednesses, heaped together, as it seems to me, would become sickeningly the same if prolonged through eternity, unless we had God for our very own. *Eternal* is an awful word, even when the noun that goes with it is *blessedness*. And I know not how even the redeemed could be saved, as the long ages rolled on, from the oppression of monotony, and the feeling, "I would not live always," unless God was "the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever." We must rise above everything that merely

applies to changes in our own natures and in our relations to the external universe, and to other orders of creatures ; and grasp, as the hidden sweetness that lies in the calyx of the gorgeous flower, the possession of God Himself as the rapture of our joy and the heaven of our heaven.

And, if that be so, then these accumulated words with which the Apostle, in his fiery, impetuous way, tries to set forth the greatness of what he is speaking about, receive a loftier meaning than they otherwise would have.

“The riches of the glory of His inheritance.” Now that word “riches,” or “wealth,” is a favourite of His ; and in this single letter occurs, if I count rightly, five times. In addition to our text, it is used twice in connection with God’s grace, “the riches of His grace” once in connection with Jesus, “the unsearchable riches of Christ” ; and once in a similar connection to, though with a different application from, our text, “the riches of His glory.” Always, you see, it is applied to something that is special and properly Divine. And here, therefore, it applies, not to the abundance of any creatural good, however exuberant and inexhaustible the store of it may be, but simply and solely to that unwearying energy, that self-feeding and ever-burning and never-decaying light which is God. Of Him alone it can be said that work does not exhaust, nor Being tend to its own extinction, nor expenditure of resources to their diminution. The guarantee for eternal blessedness is the “riches” of the eternal God. And so we may be sure that no time can exhaust, nor any expenditure empty, either His storehouse or our wealth.

And, again, the "glory" is not the lustrous light, however dazzling to our feeble eyes that may be, of any creature that reflects the light of God, but it is the far-flashing and never-dying radiance of His own manifestation of Himself to the hearts and souls of them that love Him. And so the "inheritance is incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away"; not merely by reason of the communicated will of God operating upon creatures whom He preserves untarnished by corruption, and ungnawed by decay, but because He Himself is the "inheritance," and on Him time hath no power. On His wealth all His creatures may hang for ever; and it shall be as it was in the sweet parable of the miracle of old, the fragments that remain will be more than when the meal began. "The riches of the glory of His inheritance."

II.—Now, notice, secondly, the heirs.

The words of my text receive, perhaps, their best commentary and explanation in those words which the writer of them heard, on the Damascus road, when the voice from Heaven spoke to him about men "obtaining an inheritance among them that are sanctified." It almost sounds like an echo of the long past, but never-to-be-forgotten voice, when our Apostle writes as he does in our text.

Now what does he mean by "saints"? Who are these amongst whom the broad acres of that infinite prairie are to be parted out? The word has attracted to itself contemptuous meanings and ascetical meanings, and meanings which really deny the true democracy of Christianity, and the equality of all believers in the sight of God. But its Scriptural use has none of these narrowing and confusing associations adhering

to it, nor does it even directly and at first mean, as we generally take it to mean, pure men, holy in the sense of clean and righteous. But something goes before that phase of meaning, and it is this—a saint is a man separated and set apart for God, as His property. That is the true meaning of the word. It is its meaning as it is applied to the vessels of the Temple, the priests, the services, and the altar. It is its meaning, only with the necessary substitution of spirit for body, as it is applied in the New Testament as a designation co-extensive with that of believers.

How does a man belong to God?

We asked a minute or two ago how God belonged to men. The answer to the converse question is almost identical. A man belongs to God by the affection of his heart, by the submission of his will, by the reference of his actions to Him; and he who thus belongs to God, in the same act in which he gives himself to God, receives God as his possession. The thing must be reciprocal. “All mine is Thine.” And God answers, “And all Mine is thine.” He ever meets our “O, Lord, I yield myself to Thee,” with His “And, My child, I give Myself to thee.” It is so in regard of our earthly loves. It is so in regard of our relations to Him. And, that being the case, purity, which is generally taken by careless readers as being the main idea of sanctity, will follow this self-surrender, which is the basis of all goodness everywhere and always.

If that be true, and I do not think it can be denied effectively, then the next step is a very plain one, and that is that for the perfect possession of God, which is heaven, the same thing is needed in its perfection which is required for the partial possession of Him

that makes the Christian life of earth. And, just as here we get Him for ours in proportion as we give up ourselves to be His, so yonder the inheritance belongs, and can only belong, to "the saints." So, then, one can see that there is nothing arbitrary in this limitation of a possession, which in its very nature cannot go beyond the bounds which are thus marked out for it. If heaven were the vulgar thing that some of you think it, if that future life were desirable simply because you escaped from some external punishment, and got all sorts of outward blessings and joys, felicities and advantages, hung round the neck, or pinned upon the breast, as they do on successful fighters, why then, of course, there might be partiality in the distribution of the decorations. But if that possession hinges upon our yielding ourselves to Him, then there is not an arbitrary link in the whole chain. Faith is set forth as the condition of heaven, because faith is the means of union with Christ, by and from whom alone we draw the motives for self-surrender and the power for sanctity. You cannot have heaven unless you have God. That is step number one. You cannot have God unless you have "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." That is step number two. You cannot have holiness without faith. That is step number three. "An inheritance among them that are sanctified;" and then there is added, "by faith which is in Me."

It is clear, too, what a fatal delusion some of us are under who think that we shall, and fancy that we should like to, as we say, "go to heaven when we die." Why, heaven is here, round about you, a present heaven in the imitation of God, in the practice

of righteousness, in the cultivation of dependence upon Him, in the yielding of yourselves up to Him. Heaven is here, and by your own choice you stop outside of it. There must be a correspondence between environment and nature for blessedness. "The mind is its own place," as the great Puritan poet taught us, "and makes a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." Fishes die on the shore, and the man that drew them out dies in the water. Gills cannot breathe where lungs are useful, and lungs cannot, where gills come into play. If you have not here and now the holiness which knits you to God, and gives you possession of Him, you would not like it, if it were possible to carry you to that place, in so far as it is a place. It is rather strange, if you hope to go to heaven when you die, that you should be very unwilling to spend a little time in it whilst you are alive, and that you should expect blessedness then from that presence of God which brings you no blessedness now.

III.—Lastly, we have here the heirs' present knowledge of their future blessedness.

The Apostle asks that these men may know a thing that clearly seems unknowable. It is an impossible petition, we might be ready to say, because it is clear enough that there can be no true knowledge of the conditions and details of that future life. The dark mountains that lie between us and it hide their secret well, and few or no stray beams have reached us. An unborn babe, or a chrysalis in a hole in the ground or in a chink of a tree, might think as wisely about its future condition as we can do

about that life beyond. There can be no knowledge until there is experience.

What, then, does Paul mean by framing such a petition as this? The answer is found in noticing that the knowledge which he is imploring here is a consequence of a previous knowledge. For, in a former verse, he prays that these men may have "the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of God"; and when they have got the knowledge of God he thinks that they will have got the "knowledge of the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Now, turn that into other words, and it is just this, that the knowledge of God, which comes by faith and love here, is in kind so identical with the fullest and loftiest riches of the knowledge of Him hereafter, that, if we know the one, we are not ignorant of the other. The one is in germ, the other, no doubt, full blown; the one is the twinkling of the rushlight as it were, the other is the blaze of the sunshine. The two states of being are so correspondent that from the one we draw our clearest knowledge of the other. They make telescopes, in using which you do not look up when you want to see the stars, but down on to a reflecting mirror, and there you see them. Such a reflecting mirror, though it be sometimes muddied and dimmed, and always very small, are the experiences of the Christian soul here.

So, dear friends, if we want to know as much as may be known of the blessedness of Heaven, let us seek to possess as much as may be possessed of the knowledge and love of God on earth. Then we shall know the centre, at any rate; and that is light, though the circumference may be very dark. Much will

remain obscure. That is of very small consequence to Hope, which does not need information half as much as it needs assurance. Like some flower in the cranny of the rock, it can spread a broad bright blossom on little soil, if only it be firmly rooted.

The path for us all is plain. Come to Jesus Christ as sinful men, and take what He has given, who has given Himself for us. Touched by His love, let us love Him back again, and yield ourselves to Him, and He will give Himself to us. They who can say, "O Lord! I am Thine," are sure to hear from Heaven, "I am thine." And they who possess, in being possessed by, God Himself do not need to die in order to go to Heaven, but are at least doorkeepers in the house of the Lord now, and stand where they can see into the inner sanctuary which they will one day tread. A life of faith brings Heaven to us, and thereby gives us the surest and the clearest knowledge of what we shall be, and have, when we are brought to Heaven.



The Measure of Immeasurable Power.

“That ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ.”—EPHESIANS i. 19, 20.

“HE riches of the glory of the inheritance” will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt—“and can *I* ever hope to reach it?” Our paths are strewn with battle-fields where we were defeated; how should we expect the victor’s wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends in Ephesus need when he has asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfil the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that worketh in us. It is “exceeding.” Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, may

help us to supply the missing words. He speaks of the "love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and of God being "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." The power which is really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. "According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ." Is that heaping together of synonyms, or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words, in that the first of them is the more active and outward, and the last of them is the more inward. And so they liken them to fruit and branch and root; but we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable; and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is His wont, is swept away by the ardour of his faith and the clearness of his vision, and breaks from his purpose to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself this morning to the words which I have read as my text, with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

I.—So, then, I ask you to look, first, at the measure

and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christian men.

“According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.” The Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens—these are the things which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-works, the *chef-d’œuvre* of the power that is operating in all Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a man, and, that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, the members and their Head, the Christ and His Church, are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatso-

ever the one is, there, and that, must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears, and consciousness of my own weakness, creep across me, and all my hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is, when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and think that He, in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness, is not only the pattern of what humanity may be, but the pledge of what His Church must be. "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." "The glory that Thou gavest Me I have given them."

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that worketh in us, but as this same letter teaches us, we have, as Christians, a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of His Lord, which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, "And you hath He quickened." And then, catching it up a verse or two afterwards, reiterates, clause by clause, what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power hath "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye and heart-filling glories of the ascended Christ give us the measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the

resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives are concerned, and the scope and the aim of them, "in the heavens," and "sit with Him in heavenly places"—these things afford us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords; and because He who is our Life "is exalted high above all principalities and powers"; and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin, and has drawn us so near to Himself that if we are His we truly live beside Him, even whilst we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

II.—Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.

We have already come across the same apparent paradox, covering a deep truth, in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture, but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience, and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object.

How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath its force. How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness, and lifts us buoyant above our

temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits might be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which works in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions, but that we should have the vital knowledge which is, and which comes from, life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure; though it be, in its depth and fulness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly-discovered country to be sure of its existence, and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores. And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God, and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience, we have such a certified acquaintance with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted, and to become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view, and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass, but yet it is the sky that we see, and we can

think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passeth knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of and constant reference to the measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said, "Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour, and hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands." And hundreds of years afterwards the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus, "We see not yet all things put under Him." Was the old vision a dream, was it never intended to be fulfilled? Apparently so, if we take the history of the past into account, and the centuries that have passed since have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will rise to the height which the Psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted, almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery; when we look on the world as it is to-day, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the "working of the strength of the might which He wrought in

Christ.” “We see not yet all things put under Him.” Be it so, “but we see Jesus,” and, looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above him. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there. We try but slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff, and say, “We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below?” Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us, and lifts us, and sets us there.

“No man hath ascended up into Heaven save He that came down from Heaven,” and having returned thither stoops thence, and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor, weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition, when we think of such force at our disposal, and so poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, should teach us to expect great things of God, and to be intolerant of present attainments whilst anything remains unattained.

And it should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realize the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that He is strong in might, not one faileth." That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the Divine power. It is great to preserve the ancient heavens fresh and strong by His might, but it is greater to come down to my weakness, to "give power to the faint," and "increase strength to them that have no might." And that is what He will do with us.

III.—Lastly, notice the conditions for the operations of the power.

"To usward who believe," says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians, and saying "ye," but now, by that "us," he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them; and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

"To usward who believe." Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain, that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort.

How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the

hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father, who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one, and, if you have only a thimble in your hand, you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power; the one is that infinite limit of "the power which He wrought in Christ," and the other the practical limit. The working measure of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible to ourselves, and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? And if, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought, and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two, that barely refreshes our parched lips, and does nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose fault is that? The practical measure of the power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him, as I pray we all may, and continue there, and ask from Him strength, according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, "According to your faith be it unto you."

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